

A color photograph of Brigadier-General Godwin Alabi-Isama. He is a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a red beret and aviator sunglasses. He is dressed in a camouflage military uniform with a red insignia on the shoulder. He is holding binoculars and looking off to the side. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with trees.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL GODWIN ALABI-ISAMA

THE TRAGEDY OF VICTORY

**On-the-Spot Account of the Nigeria-Biafra
War in the Atlantic Theatre**

A color photograph of Brigadier-General Godwin Alabi-Isama. He is a Black man with a beard and mustache, wearing a red beret and aviator sunglasses. He is dressed in a camouflage military uniform with two red stars on his left shoulder. He is looking off to the right. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with trees.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL GODWIN ALABI-ISAMA

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Brigadier-General Godwin Alabi-Isama

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Godwin Alabi-Isama



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DEDICATION

THIS book is dedicated to my dearest, courageous, indefatigable mother and my guardian angel, Alhaja Jeminatu Ajiun Isama, who, with her prayers, her love for her only son, and moral guidance, saw me through the Nigeria-Biafra war, and at those difficult times of my life; and still leading me through life — I salute all mothers.



Also to my colleagues, male and female, of 3MCDO who paid the supreme sacrifice in the effort to keep Nigeria one and united. I salute these unsung heroes and heroines, without whom victory would have been difficult for this great country.

Godwin Alabi-Isama

Lagos, October, 2012

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FOREWORD (I)

The civil war, pitting secessionist Biafra against Nigeria from 1967 to 1970 was one of the greatest African tragedies of the 20th century. In the context of my own life, it took place during the transition from elementary to junior secondary school, between the ages of eight and eleven. Ever since then, my generation and others within and outside Nigeria have longed for credible information and insight from those who were directly involved in executing the war.

Over the years, there have been many accounts, little drops, that have sought to make up the ocean of records for the sake of posterity. However, this magnificent book, written by Brigadier-General Godwin Alabi-Isama (rtd.), who rose to become the Principal General Staff Officer of the Nigerian Army, exemplifies history at its best, told truthfully through the prism of a great military life. He captures those events and contextualises them in the transitional period from decolonisation to Nigerianisation of Nigeria's warrior class, warts and all. The book takes the reader through the writer's experiences from the process of joining the army, officer training, his experience during the United Nations operations in the Congo, subsequent military training, and the terrible events of 1966 that set the stage for the outbreak of war in 1967.

By accident of birth, to a blessed union of parents from different ethnic groups, the writer criss-crossed ethnic, regional and religious cultures. This fact of upbringing, played pivotal roles at various stages of his career, none so dramatic as his experience in the 4th Area Command of the Nigerian Army in the then Mid-Western Region. For all of us who love reading Nigerian political and military history, Brigadier-General Alabi-Isama has filled one of the great

voids in accounts heretofore available about the Biafran invasion of the Mid-West Region in August 1967.

But it was his direct personal knowledge of and participation in the conceptualisation and execution of strategy and tactics during operations of the 3 Marine Commando Division, initially under Colonel (later Brigadier) Benjamin Adekunle (rtd.) and subsequently, then Colonel (later General) Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd.), that marks out this memoirs as a priceless contribution to Nigerian military history. One can confidently predict that in time to come, it will take a pride of place in our national archives.

I highly recommend the book to Nigerian and foreign military officers, historians and officer training institutions.

Dr Nowamagbe A. Omoigui

Columbia, USA.

January 15, 2011.

FOREWORD (II)

It is a special honour and privilege for me to write a foreword to this book which essentially chronicles the events of the Nigerian Civil War, (1967-70) especially as they relate to the activities of the Third Marine Commando, initially commanded by Col. Benjamin Adekunle. It is particularly heart-warming for me, considering the fact that the author, Brigadier-General Alabi-Isama, is himself proud to trace his roots to Ilorin and used his Muslim name until the vicissitudes of his career experience forced him to change his name.

The Tragedy of Victory is a historical work which serves as a rich source of information on the situation in Nigeria just after independence and focuses, particularly, on the events of the Civil War. It is a must read for every concerned Nigerian who is interested in getting the true picture of what happened during the war. It is also a challenge to other participants in the war to document their experiences.

This is the story of a young man who went into the army not by design but by accident of history. He went in at a time when the military was regarded as a place for school dropouts. He was attracted by the soldiers' smart uniforms and well co-ordinated parades when they marched past in front of their school compound. This is a story of how fate plays a hand in what we become in life, the story of a young man who was so closely attached to his mother, a story of a mother who loved her son so much that she risked her life often and visited him in the war front! This is a story of a man of peace who believes that war should always be the last resort.

"Don't fire a shot if you can avoid it;" that was his guiding principle even as a war commander. This is a story of a man

who struggled hard to spot the thin line between love of one's country, love of one's mother and love of one's self. It is also the story of a man who is frustrated at the decadence that has enveloped the entire country, particularly the armed forces that suddenly became polarised along ethnic or regional lines and a country where heroes are not recognised and rewarded — a country where only mediocre, ex-convicts and criminals are celebrated!

As I browsed through this copiously illustrated book with photographs and figures, dealing with the chilly, harrowing war experiences of the author, certain factors touched my heart:

- the pervasive influence of the mother over this young man and his own complete submission to the will of his mother who was always by his side;
- the sad account of how Isaac Boro was killed so cheaply in a house near Port Harcourt, not on the battlefield;
- the stage-by-stage, rather moving account of the 30-day march from Calabar to Port Harcourt;
- the accounts of how the author watched his close friends die in the war front; and
- his conclusion which I choose to paraphrase as follows (not his exact words): “while patriots talk about the next generation, politicians talk about the next election.”

This is a book every Nigerian must read. It is written in a smooth, relaxed, graphic and somewhat personal style which allowed the author to narrate events as he remembered them, even at the risk of tautology. It is simply readable and comprehensive - a must read for anybody who wants to enrich his knowledge and a great education on providence.

Browsing through the draft of this book, was for, me a wonderful experience. I am sure it would be found to be a

grand and glorious adventure.



Alhaji (Dr.) Ibrahim Sulu-Gambari, CFR
Emir of Ilorin & Chairman, Kwara State
Council of Chiefs;
Chancellor, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,
Anambra State of Nigeria



FOREWORD (III)

Many books have been written by officers and men who took part in the Nigeria-Biafra war but none of them can be compared with this book in objectivity, in documentation and in explaining or capturing military tactics and strategy. Brigadier-General Alabi-Isama was Chief of Staff of 3Marine Commando Division of the Nigerian Army at the time and has put his personal account in this book as a good story well told.

I am very delighted at the honour given to me to write a foreword to this book, *The Tragedy of Victory*, by its author, Brig-Gen. Alabi-Isama. By divine intervention, he survived to tell his story with facts and figures. Copiously illustrated with pictures, operational maps and documents, each of which tells its own story, the book is very intriguing, and most revealing in detailing military tactics and operations.

This is also symbolic for me in a way because I was a major in 1960 and the only Nigerian in the team of foreign officers that interviewed and recruited the author into the Nigerian Army. He was 20 years old then. We knew that this young man would be an asset to Nigeria and the Nigerian Army in particular judging, by the way and manner in which he answered our questions at the interview.

Alabi-Isama took part in all military activities at home and abroad including sports at all levels, and creditably too. His very dear mother followed her only son everywhere before, during and after the war; she was at every captured area of the 3MCDO during the civil war - a mother indeed. Alabi-Isama had a stint as tactics instructor at the Nigerian Military School (NMS), Zaria in 1962/ 63 and at the Nigerian Military Training College, Kaduna in 1966/67. These

experiences stood him in good stead when he had to turn theory into practice at the 3MCDO sector of the civil war.

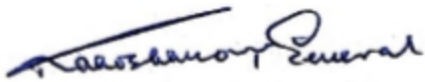
Anyone who is, therefore, interested in military strategy and tactics need not look further for a better book, and particularly as applied to the 3MCDO sector of the Nigeria-Biafra war. Anyone who is also interested in military history and of the civil war, here is the book so magnificently put together today for us all and generations yet unborn.

Alabi-Isama carefully and skillfully put together his own story covering the events as he took part in each stage which is different from the usual genre of fictions and mere story telling of the civil war. He was there, he took part and saw it all; he was 27 years old at the time. Alabi-Isama and his advancing troops had the good sense to look after the millions of civilian population everywhere they were encountered. He re-kitted the captured Biafran officers and men who were prisoners of war (POWs), he fed and retrained them when captured because the AIM was *“to keep Nigeria one”*. This officer had to arrange for his troops to have one meal a day in order to have enough for the natives as well — what a great leader who had the good sense to think of others at that trying period in the history of this nation.

I have the hope that many more officers and men and all that took part in the civil war will be encouraged by this book to write their personal accounts of the war and for those still serving to know that record keeping is just as important as the service itself. The military history of the Nigeria-Biafra war which lasted 1967-1970 should never be forgotten and so are the efforts of those officers, men and women of 3MCDO who, without adequate resources and vehicles made the best use of what they got; yet they fought and advanced 205 kilometres in 30 days from Calabar to capture Port Harcourt. No wonder the civil war ended in that sector with their strategy of engaging Biafra's

“centre of gravity”, and the tactics of striking hard and striking sure. We will also never forget the efforts of General Benjamin Adekunle (The Black Scorpion) who was their General Officer Commanding (GOC) up to Aba and Owerri capturing today’s Cross River State, Akwa Ibom State, Rivers State and Bayelsa State. Alabi-Isama said it all. This book is simply monumental and fascinating. I will simply put it as “Alabi-Isama served,” and his story is here in this book for all to read.

I, therefore, recommend this book to all Nigerians at home and abroad, to all military officers and men and to the international community to read the book that Alabi-Isama titled, “The Tragedy of Victory” It is the story of a true leader.



Major-General Robert Adeyinka ADEBAYO (rtd)

Lagos, September 2011

FOREWORD (IV)

I was highly delighted that Brigadier-General Godwin Alabi-Isama requested me as his old Commander-In-Chief that I write the Foreword to his book, which is a mix of his personal history as well as his account of the role he played in the Nigerian Civil War. But I found the title, *The Tragedy of Victory* somewhat puzzling. Indeed, the first few pages of the work made me wonder why he chose the title, considering that he was one of the principal actors in the 3rd Marine Commando of the Nigerian Army Division that received the instrument of surrender from the Acting Commander-in-Chief, Col.(Gen.) Phillip Effiong of the Biafran Armed Forces. After reading through the first part of the book and not finding a clue to the riddle, I came to the conclusion that, no matter what, the answer would be found in its final chapters!

I read through the manuscript parts 1 to 3 and I was fascinated and impressed. I felt proud that the army which I presided over at the time as Commander-in-Chief produced such brilliant and courageous officers as the author. He wrote in a style that made the book a compelling read from start to finish. *Tragedy of Victory* is one of the very few books written by frontline combatants from both sides that I have had the privilege of reading. Alabi-Isama, I am proud to say, is a worthy representative of the qualitative officer cadre Nigeria had at the time. That he kept such detailed records and even accompanied them with numerous properly captioned photographic shots is highly commendable.

With the above, my Foreword may seem to be a review of the book which is not my duty but that of the eminent book reviewer.

One of the facts that easily stand out in this three-part book is the manner in which Alabi-Isama treated the circumstances of his history that nearly made him belong, as it were, neither here nor there in the land of his birth. His father, a native of Kwale in today's Delta State, had settled and worked in Ilorin, Kwara State where he met and married a Yoruba woman. His mother later became so proficient in the Kwale dialect that no one could doubt that it was not her mother tongue. Owing to the premature death of his father, Alabi-Isama was raised in Ilorin, where he assumed the name Abdulrahman Alabi. Years later, he traced his father's village of Utagba-Uno and linked up with his father's people. Thereafter, he took the decision to revert to his father's given name of Godwin Alabi-Isama.

Although he duly effected his name change in the Army as well as in the press, his journey back to his roots created challenges as well as opportunities that manifested during the Nigerian Civil War. He was an object of suspicion, as he was initially not trusted by either side of the warring factions owing to a lack of appreciation of who he truly was. When, as Abdulrahman Alabi (as he then was), he was posted to the Mid-West, to which all senior Mid-Western Ibo officers for safety reasons were posted, his social dilemma was heightened. Although he was an Ndokwa by parentage, yet he was regarded as a Northern spy by his Ibo colleagues in the Mid-West. At the same time, some of his Northern military colleagues were not sure where his sympathy lay. But as a good soldier, he appreciated his special dilemma and took reasonable steps to guarantee his personal safety.

His acceptance as an Ndokwa citizen after tracing and establishing his roots and linking up with his father's ancestral home lent credibility to his campaign to win the support of the Ndokwa people for the federal cause in the brewing conflict between the federal government and the fledgling secessionist state.

From the series of events recorded in Asaba and the Mid-West during the Civil War, one came to the conclusion that Alabi-Isama's posting to the Mid- West at that crucial time of our nation's history was not only fortuitous, it was God sent. Like Joseph of the Bible, he would live to help end the secession and join in preventing the break-up of Nigeria.

Although he was arrested and was enlisted into the Biafran army, he planned and executed a masterly escape to link up with troops of the 2nd Division of the Nigerian Army sent to liberate the Mid-West. By his account, he later reported to Army Headquarters in Lagos following a radio message that the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) had summoned him. He had assumed that the invitation was hinged on the desire of the C-in-C to show him appreciation for the timely warning he had given to Army Headquarters about the planned Biafran infiltration into the Mid-West. Rather than the honour and decoration he had expected, he was incarcerated. He believed I had ordered his detention.

As Head of State and Commander-in-Chief then and up to today, I had no recollection of asking that Alabi-Isama be recalled from the war front to see me in Lagos. Even today, I still do not have any recollection of having given any such order. It is not in my character and leadership style to destroy officers and men but rather to reform them for ultimately greater service to the nation. It is highly probable that Army Headquarters might have acted on some intelligence report based on his capture and his forced enlistment in the Biafran Army. At any rate, that unexplained 'invitation' supposedly by the Head of State became the unknown factor that obviously saved him from being among the precious souls that perished in the 2nd Division's attempt to cross the River Niger to Onitsha at Asaba; which I had strongly objected to and had ordered the Divisional Commander not to undertake, but did at heavy cost of lives.

On learning about the tragic occurrence at Asaba, I had lamented the sad loss of so many fine officers like Alabi-Isama and Alani Akinrinade. Even at that, no one told me that Alabi-Isama was in Lagos and under some “protective” custody in Kirikiri Maximum Prison! This book, therefore, has thrown into relief the fact that unknown to the Commander-in-Chief, some of his aides did use his name to do things he had not authorised. This fact could only have explained Alabi-Isama’s incarceration in Kirikiri Maximum Prison without my knowledge!

I commend Alabi-Isama’s incredible ability to keep records even to the minutest details. This is one thread that runs through the entire work.

He vividly recounted how the officers of the 3rd Marine Commando, of which he was the Chief of Staff, received orders of battle, planned and strategized as well as simulated engagements with the adversary before arriving at the best course to pursue to achieve their goals. His recollections of in-house debates as to how best to achieve military objectives and how the course of military engagements were decided upon and executed must be of great interest to potential battle commanders anywhere in the world. His detailed account of the military campaigns and engagements leading to the capture and liberation of city after city and the ultimate capitulation of the Biafran forces must also be of great interest to military establishments all over the world. The campaign for the liberation of Port Harcourt is one case that calls for a deep and close study. By conventional military practice, invading Port Harcourt from Bonny, covering a distance of only 50 km, ought to have been a non-debatable option to reach the target than going through the 300 km Calabar route that was obviously longer, apparently costlier and more demanding. Although the Commanding Officer, Col. Benjamin Adekunle aka Black Scorpion, had initially

preferred the invasion-through-Bonny option, by the time the debates were over, he bought into and accepted the Calabar option because it was a more realistic option. They took it and achieved victory in a record time of 30 days covering about 480 km of inhospitable and most difficult terrain. They deserve the highest commendation.

At the end of Part Two of this work one got a feeling that it was time to draw the curtain on the theatre of war, the more so as the military objective of keeping Nigeria one had been achieved with the Biafran surrender to the authority of the Federal Government of Nigeria. This was not to be as the author felt that he owed a duty to posterity to keep the records of the war straight, particularly in respect of the area over which he was one of the principal actors. This is against the backdrop of the account of the war by the last Commander of the Third Marine Commando, General Olusegun Obasanjo, in his book, *My Command* which, according to Alabi-Isama, contained some serious and historical errors. Part Three of this book, therefore, is essentially his critique of General Obasanjo's published work on his (Obasanjo's) role in the Civil War. Whilst it is true that Obasanjo was not physically present in the war front, especially at the time of the routing of the Biafran Army, yet as the Commanding Officer assigned to command the Division that received the instrument of surrender from Biafra, General Obasanjo rightfully was positioned to claim victory on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

Although *The Tragedy of Victory* is primarily a book on military campaigns and battle engagements, Alabi-Isama spiced it very well with autobiographical details, he memorably and movingly captured his loving mother's interest and involvement in his career and welfare. How better could a mother demonstrate love than by defying the risks of death to visit her son in the theatre of war? 'Alhaja',

as the author fondly calls his mother, was her child's greatest fan.

It is, perhaps, in the area of the Army Headquarters' appreciation' and 'reward' of Alabi-Isama's gallantry and heroic war efforts as well as the premature posting out of the division (3rd Marine Commando and ultimately termination of his brilliant military career, on what he regarded as tendentious and fallacious grounds, that one comes closest to realising why he chose as title of the book: *The Tragedy of Victory!*

On this score, therefore, the book appears to be the author's loud statement of the need to rectify what appears to smack of injustice perpetrated against the otherwise innocent. This is not just an army problem. It is national malaise that causes people in authority to use the weight of their office and authority to hurt perceived personal 'enemies'. With the firm establishment of democratic governance in Nigeria, wrongs done under both the military and civil authorities as a result of abuse of power can and should be reopened and investigated to do justice to the aggrieved.

With this work, Godwin Alabi-Isama has made an invaluable contribution to understanding our nation's history and our national aspiration to build a just and egalitarian society. He has unobtrusively posed the question whether anyone, however highly placed, should get away with injustice deliberately perpetrated against innocent even under cover of national security.

Tragedy of Victory, I believe, recommends itself as a major standard text to military institutions and the academia as well as any one who wants to learn of military history or campaigns and battle engagements of the Nigerian Civil War.



General Dr. Yakubu Gowon, GCFR

FOREWORD (V)

The Tragedy of Victory may well be the first truly military account of the Nigerian Civil War to come from the Nigerian side. As the Nigerian Army had no central command in the field during the war, this book dealt with only the operations of the 3rd Marine Commando Division (3MCODO) of the Nigerian Army. As a result, the book may appear to be incomplete or limited in scope; yet, it renders a detailed professional account of the major manoeuvres of the 3MCODO.

When in a swift move into the Midwest Region the Biafra troops captured the author, rather than send him to Biafra to face an uncertain future, he was given a chance to 'escape' to Nigeria as his best option. The author had previously escaped death narrowly in Northern Nigeria during the initial stages of the revolution as he tried to establish his true tribal identity. His attempt to save the lives of some Ibo officers and civilians in Kaduna, confirmed him as an Ibo and that put his life in great danger. He was helped by top military and civilian leaders to escape to the South, under arrangements made by his mother- a Northerner. That was probably why the Biafran officer who captured him thought he should be given a chance to remain in Nigeria where he had been accepted. At least, so it seemed. However, after his escape, rather than being commended for bravery and loyalty, he was recalled to Lagos and put in Kirikiri maximum security prison as a 'potential Ibo saboteur'. Thus, the officer had by now, missed death three times — one, as an Iboman in Northern Nigeria; two, —as a prisoner of war with Biafran army, and three, — as an 'Ibo Saboteur' in Kirikiri maximum prison. After a few weeks of detention, he was posted from

the prison to 3MCODO Division where he served for most of the Civil War.

Gen. Alabi-Isama, though relatively inexperienced at the beginning of the Civil War, has always been keen and disciplined. These qualities of leadership and man-management are well reflected in his accounts of the military operations undertaken by his division. Though his account of the 2 Division recapture of the Midwest Region from Biafra is very interesting, yet his views, conclusions, and assessment of the Biafran Army are mostly incorrect. This is because the author was not in any position to have access to information on Biafran Army operations.

For instance, the author may not have known that the Midwest Biafran offensive was personal to Col. Victor Banjo using scantily armed militiamen and kept a secret from the then Biafran Army Commander. Moreover, the author could not have known that Col. Banjo had deceived Gen. Ojukwu into authorising him to undertake the operation to capture Lagos through Benin and Ibadan. On getting to Benin and holding discussions with some foreign embassies, Banjo changed his aim from capturing Lagos to overthrowing Gen. Ojukwu. Unfortunately, he paid for his sabotage with his life.

The major operations of the 3MCODO Division against Calabar, Port Harcourt, Aba, Ikot Ekpene, and Owerri were dealt with in such details as to show that the author fought the war from the trenches. These accounts also revealed the true and fake heroes of the division. In addition, they reveal that the division had massive administrative and logistics support in comparison with the entire Biafran Army support. With that amount of support, one wonders why it took the whole Nigerian Army 30 months to accomplish a police action it set out to do in one month. As the commander of the Biafran Army, I believe that if Biafra had only a fraction of what the 3MCODO Division had, any of the over15

combatant colonels in the Biafran Army at the beginning of the war could have repelled the Nigerian attack within six months. Above all, the book shows that victory in war depends more on relative strengths of opposing forces, than on the ranks of the officers involved.

As this book deals with only a sector of the war, it is expected that the field commanders in other sectors of the Nigerian Army, will write to complete the story well begun by Gen. Alabi-Isama. Though the book made little or no attempt to discuss the reasons why the war became necessary in the first place, that omission can be filled by other Nigerian field commanders when they write.

Finally, I congratulate Gen. Alabi-Isama for a book well written. The numerous photographs in the book tell stories as interesting and revealing as the book itself. All these have made *The Tragedy of Victory* an indispensable part of any meaningful account of the Nigerian Civil War.

*Alexandriebo Maj-Gen
G.O.C. Biafran Army.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oh Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord. — *Isaiah 38vl 6-20*

First of all, let me thank God, who despite all odds, kept me alive to write this book.

I also thank Him for giving me my dear parents, and my mother in particular. She stood by me through thick and thin; a woman of immense inner strength without whom it would have been very difficult to write this book. A woman who, right from when I was six years old, had always drummed into my head that whatever God did not give me — be it property or money, the devil would take manyfold, and in many ways from me.

With a heavy heart, I pay tribute and honour to the memory of this very dear mother. I just cannot express how much I miss her and all her efforts at inspiring me in life. Indeed, she remains:

'Opomulero Omoluwabi, Omo agbo tikuyo, 'The source of strength in the household.

Omo bale Amuro,

Sun Re o’.

The daughter of the Head of
Amuro family

Sleep well in the bosom of
the Lord.’

I know how much she prayed for me to survive the civil war. Thank you for your prayers, moral guidance, and support at all times. I survived as you prayed, to write this book.

Her love for record-keeping, and pictures which I also imbibed gave me a unique source of information for this book.

I thank Mr. Emmanuel Nwaoshai, who mobilised all the secretaries in his office for more than six months to type my scripts. I also thank Mr. Obafemi, for letting me believe in myself that I had what it took to write this book myself when I was hunting for a writer. I thank Mr. Adekunle Adekoya, a journalist for his work on this book. My greatest thanks to the executive chairman of Spectrum Books Limited, Hon. Chief Dayo Ogunniyi, the management and staff for their professional handling of the final stage of this book especially at a time that I almost abandoned the entire project because people that I contacted to assist me to put a finishing touch to it were too busy doing their own stuff. I had wasted valuable time indeed. It is my first book and I was not sure of what to do to get it right until I got to Spectrum Books Limited. Thank you.

I must also thank Engr. Gbolahan Alabi-Isama and Oluwagbemileke Alabi-Isama, two of my children, who did most of the computer work; Mr Yemi Adewoyin my dear son-in-law who, despite his busy schedules, found time to edit and proofread the book from my military language to a more acceptable English language. How can I forget to thank my dear son and my carbon copy, Olatokunbo Alabi-Isama, who

found in his law school library, some false information about me published in the Nigerian federal government gazette. This book would not have been complete in many respects, without this information now put right in this book. I also thank the remaining members of my family for their understanding as I missed many meal times, prayer times, and the usual games with grand and great grand kids. I sincerely thank the Emir of Ilorin, SHEHU, who, amidst all his tight schedules, read my three volumes of the scripts in just 30 days, made corrections, and discussed the book with me for a whole full day, and then wrote his comment in the foreword (2) of this book. I am also grateful to General Adeyinka Adebayo who recruited me into the Nigerian Army, and today is the most senior Nigerian military officer alive. General Adebayo travelled with the scripts everywhere he went just to ensure that I meet a set date for launching. I thank Dr. Nowa Omoigui, a medical doctor in the USA, for his interest in this book and in military history generally. He wrote the foreword and assisted in correcting critical dates in the book.



Bolomope



Effiong

I cannot forget to thank Sgt.(Alhaji) Amusa Bolomope of Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State, who, with Sgt. Effiong of 'OUR STUDIOS' at Uyo, and Mrs. Agnes Filani of the then *Daily Sketch* of Ibadan and Chief Peter Obe, a celebrated veteran photo journalist took many of the photographs in this book for me at the war front. While

3MCDO troops carried weapons to defend themselves in the battle field, Bolomope, Effiong and Agnes Filani had no weapons other than their cameras. They carried no weapons and killed nobody. The Almighty God was their defence. It is a pity that Sgt. Effiong died before the publication of this book. May his gentle soul rest in perfect peace. Amen.

Finally, I thank those people in my life who caused me pain by telling lies, by attempting to discredit me — the son of an *"Omoluabi"*, who was also raised to be an EXCELLENT and honest person, and those who skilfully used their position and authority both in the military and government to try to make my mother cry. I have no reason to bear them any grudge, for without these people, nothing else could have inspired me to write this book. They almost made me believe that I did not have what it took to do so. How wrong they were!

PROLOGUE

The aim of this book is to keep people informed about our recent past in which our present generation, to my mind, had been misinformed by the very elders who started what they could barely finish. These elders rode on the backs of the youth who bore the weight of what they did not understand. They went to war that they did not cause, and two million people died as a result. Many of them were the youth. This book will open our minds to the atrocities caused by the elders of our country who look for whom to blame for their shortcomings and incompetence.

What I have put together here is a bit of my life story, and the Nigeria Biafra war, with facts and figures supported by photographs, maps and documents to show that those who had made claims as the sole heroes of the war were the charlatans. This book will clearly show the roles played by many patriotic men and women, and by me, as the Chief of Staff to Col. Benjamin Adekunle, who was the first General Officer Commanding 3MCDO Division of the Nigerian Army at the Atlantic theatre, and as active participant in the 30 months of the Nigeria-Biafra war. It is an authentic, on-the-spot account of the civil war as I took part.

The civil war ended over 40 years ago and I was not thinking of writing a book until the book entitled, *My Command* authored by Col. Olusegun Obasanjo was given to me in 2010, and I was warned that it was sickening to read. It truly was. By providence, I was able to come across my original photographs taken by professional photographers who joined the army because the federal government's blockade of Biafra made it impossible for them to obtain films for their cameras. When my mother was contacted and made the films available, the photographers were able to

document the war for me in pictures. In 2010, while preparing to celebrate my 70th birthday, I stumbled across my war pictures, mass documents and uniforms neatly put together in my mother's room and had never been opened for 30 years during my sojourn abroad. Therefore, with the war pictures in my hand, with the book, *My Command*, I set out to put the records right as far as 3MCDO was concerned in the Nigeria-Biafra civil war.

There should therefore be no doubt in the mind of the reader how the civil war was prosecuted in the 3 MCDO Division of the Nigerian Army, and why the war itself took so long. The strategy employed and the tactics applied for the prosecution of the war, particularly the Calabar to Obubra and Calabar to Port Harcourt advance each of which we achieved within thirty days, are clearly explained with maps and photographs.

This book is not a political story but an on-the-spot account of the war, how it was fought and those who did it, not those who claimed that they did it. It is not a book on who was right or wrong, it is my objective account and how the federal government's code of conduct was strictly adhered to even in the midst of high provocations. Hospitals were opened for women and children. Prisoners of war (POW) were fed as well as all the civilians in that sector of the war. Markets, schools, and churches were re-opened while farmers and fishermen continued to go about their business despite the war. All these were at the expense of the fighting troops.

3MCDO had no refugee camps. Refugees were encouraged to go back home while captured soldiers were retrained, rekitted and recruited into 3MCDO under the command of Col. Benjamin Adekunle, the General Officer Commanding. They proved worthy of our trust and

performed creditably. The war pictures alone speak millions of words.

The reader should note that some photographs, documents and maps have been used more than once in this book, particularly in part three which is an expose on *My Command*. This was deliberate - for the purpose of emphasis and to avoid flipping the pages back and forth in search of pictures or documents.

PART ONE

THE EARLY YEARS **(author and the war)**

Chapter One

WHAT ATTRACTED ME TO THE ARMY

My attraction to the army was rather unusual because there was nothing military about it. It was not borne out of the usual big talk of love for the fatherland to fight to save the country in the face of external aggression, or against centrifugal forces aiming at getting the country disintegrated. I was 19 years old in 1959 when I first saw the army march past at Oke Bola in front of Ibadan Boys' High School (IBHS). I neither knew nor even suspected any potential threat to our country's socio-political stability. But with the benefit of hindsight today, I can say that some important people might have known that real challenges confronted the nation and so did some senior military officers at that time.

Financial benefit was not part of my attraction to the army either. I had no idea what they paid soldiers, so the pay packet was not an incentive, more so because I was from an averagely comfortable family. In fact, I cannot think of any special military characteristics that could have attracted me into a career in the armed forces other than their musical band, the well-ironed uniform and the unison with which they marched — which, in retrospect might suggest a latent attraction to regimentation, pomp and pageantry. The command culture of the military and its characteristic aggressiveness, in their raw state, never appealed to me. What, therefore, could have attracted me to the army? It all began in 1959 when I was a student at Ibadan Boys' High School, Oke-Bola, Ibadan. I was a very good sportsman. In fact, I was the captain of my school soccer team in 1959.

Our school shared the same fence with the residence of the Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Awo) and soldiers usually marched past in front of the Action Group leader's house. Awo was Premier of the then Western Region, and the leader of a political party called the Action Group.



Soldiers of the Nigerian Army in 1958

As a young boy, I did not read any political meaning into soldiers marching past Awo's house. But from the sheer beauty of it, I developed likeness for the way they filed out in their parade. I just liked their organisation, and their uniform.

One day, in 1959, as part of their sports activities, my school was invited to the 4th Battalion in Ibadan for an invitation relay race with other schools. Incidentally, during the sports event, the person who came first in the long jump, jumped only fifteen feet. Back then, I used to do long jump at school, and I could jump eighteen feet with ease. If the best long jump soldier could only do fifteen feet, then I thought I had what it took to be in the army. But my

fascination for the army heightened during their parade to collect their medals. It was something else. They had a musical band playing; the soldiers were marching in unison, *Left-Right, Left-Right*. Their trousers and shirts were painstakingly ironed with standing edges looking as though they were razor blades that could cut through anything on their way; their shining, well-polished black shoes which reflected the sun, so overwhelmed me, I just opened my mouth in total amazement. This was all it took to make the military my profession. They were simple reasons but they were and still remain as honest as they were simple. Up till today, these have remained my inspiration and fondness for the profession.



The army's musical band that attracted me.

I then went to ask those standing around how I could join the army. At that time, life was very easy. As soon as one was in class four (fourth year) in the high school, labour ministry officials would bring a form from the Labour Office to schools for anyone interested to insert what type of work one would like to do. For me, my first choice of work was to be the housemaster of St. Theresa's College, the girls' college next to my school, on the same street at Oke Bola in Ibadan. Their

athletes were always at our school's sports ground, for their sports training, practice, and competitions. My main motive for wanting to become a coach in a girl's school was the love I had for sports, but others saw it differently and were amused. They wondered how a young man would want to be a housemaster of a girls' school. They thought it was sensual, but that was far away from my thoughts.



An army band on parade

With time, however, my leaning towards the military became stronger as I matured in reasoning. Sometime later, I completed the army form and waited for which of the results would come first. Again, at that time, I was not thinking of being an officer especially because my desire to go into the army was natural, innocent, simple, and honest, devoid of any selfishness or egotism; and that remains my pride. I knew next to nothing about the officers' corps. But in spite of my simple and honest thought of becoming just a soldier, fate, it would appear, had another plan for me.

Then I received a letter at school, with a warrant to obtain a railway ticket and report at Zaria for military recruitment. I obliged. As we assembled for the exercise, one Captain Stamper took a long look at me because he might have observed that somehow, I was different from the others who seemed not to have been to school at all.



An Army band in UK, which I was privileged to watch

He then walked up to me, and asked:

“Do you speak English?”

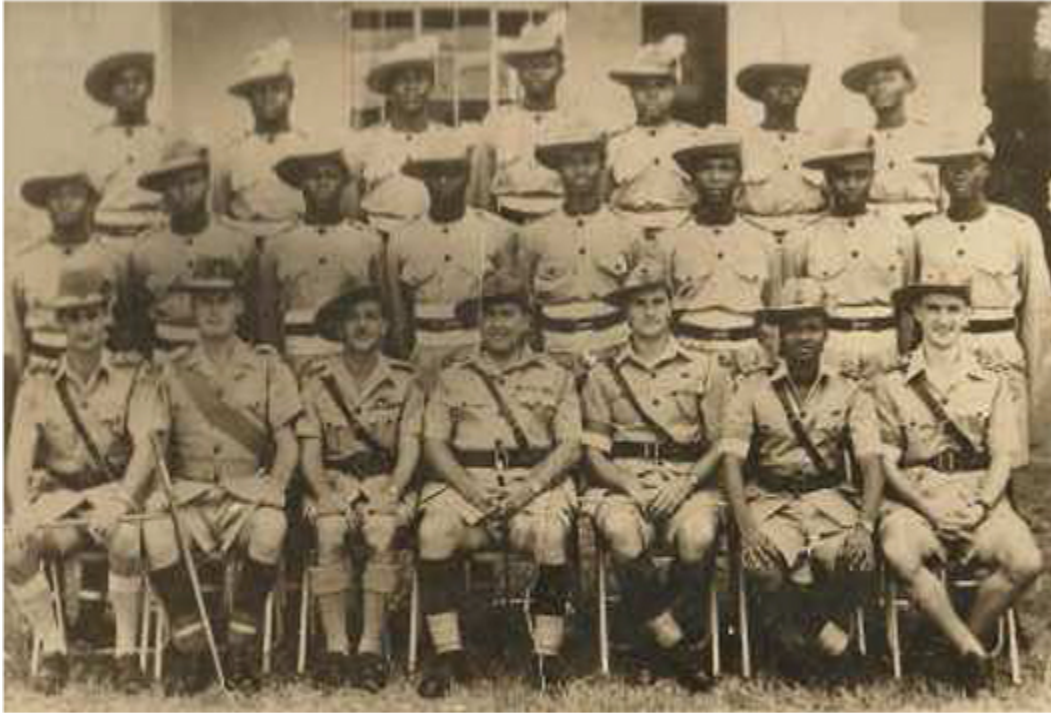


Ibadan Boys' High School, Western Region Soccer Champion 1958. The author stands third from right.

“Yes,” I answered and I told him all about my school, and that I was the captain of my school soccer team, and I boasted that we were the soccer champion of all schools in the entire Western Region.

Meanwhile, all the man asked was if I could speak English. He was, nevertheless, impressed. He took me to one office where another English officer was, who asked about my home town, and I said Ilorin, and I further told him that I was

then writing my school certificate examinations in nine subjects. I added that I was writing my English paper that Thursday but that I had come (to Zaria) because I received a letter and warrant to report that day. I was told the army would not negotiate date and time with me, to which they both laughed. He asked if I knew anything about becoming an "officer?" I asked for more explanation what that was all about and both of them laughed because I sounded amusing to the two gentlemen. It was then that they told me to take a seat, and that I was qualified for an examination to be an officer. After about ten minutes, the other officer with Capt. Stamper came up with a railway warrant for me to travel to Apapa in Lagos, from Zaria to take an examination in a week's time, and that if I passed, then I would be on my way to becoming an officer like them. Wow, that was unbelievable.



Standing Top Row(L-r):O/Cdts Obeya, Alabi, Apollo, Ihedigbo, Akinrinade, Bamigboye, and Adamu. Standing Centre Row (l-r): O/Cdts. Gbulie, Chiabi, Ariyo, Ogbemudia, Uwakwe, Eromobor, Danjuma, and Abisoye. Sitting(l-r): Capt. Collins, Sgt. Hesselden, Maj. Walker; Lt. Col. Evans, Capt. Stamper; Capt. Maimalari and Capt. Merick

I looked at these two men again, so clean and bright. I thanked them, and went away. I subsequently met Capt. Stamper at Kaduna during officer cadet training and he was very kind to me. He spoke with me almost everyday, and asked how I was doing. We had a soccer team at Kaduna during training at Nigerian Military Training College (NMTC). Capt Stamper was always happy to see me play; he was one of our instructors. I took the army examination in Geography, English, Mathematics and I passed. That was where and how my military career actually started.



*From left: Aniwun, Alabi-Isama, Akinrinade, and Ogbemudia standing.
Part of NMTC soccer team 1960 at Kaduna.*

Military training

Having been enlisted in the army in 1960, our training began in earnest. My classmates were Alani Akinrinade, Theophilus Danjuma, Samuel Ogbemudia, Ayo Ariyo, Chiabi (from the Cameroon), Philemon Shande, Ignatius Obeya, David Bamigboye, Pius Eromobor, Simon Uwakwe, Ihedigbo, Ben Gbulie, S. P. Apolo, and Emmanuel Abisoye.

We got tutored and kitted at Zaria for a while and then at Kaduna NMTC. We were the first NMTC (Now Nigerian Defence Academy, NDA) Cadets in 1960, and from there, fifteen of us who passed the examinations went to Mons Officer Cadet School, Aldershot, in England. Of the many crucial principles emphasised during our training, I took particular notice of three which I may illustrate here: *Firstly*, that the officer should see himself as the symbol of the group he is leading such that his mere facial expression can make or raise the morale of his men and he must be dependable, which in turn, would determine the fortunes of any encounter with the enemy. *Secondly*, that tact is, in

itself, a better act of valour. In other words, if the same or even better result could be achieved without pain, why fire the shot? Yes, war must always be a matter of last resort.

Thirdly, an officer must learn to accept situations as they are and see how to handle them as they arise. Hard thinking and improvising are needed rather than crying over spilled milk; that is, be independent, and use your initiative all the time, for the benefit of the group; which the instructor called “interdependence”.



Cadet training at NMTC Kaduna 1960.



Cadet training at NMTC Kaduna 1960.

Meanwhile, a situation was brewing in the Congo which, as things unfolded, facilitated our training perhaps earlier than had been envisaged. Nationalism had assumed a new dimension in Africa, particularly in the Congo, where whoever was white was a Belgian and had to be killed. And so to drastically reduce if not completely rule out the loss in the number of deaths of the junior British officers that led the Nigerian contingent to the Congo, the Nigerian Army, as a matter of deliberate policy decided to Nigerianise the junior officer cadre in the Nigerian contingent sent to the Congo. They organised a quick examination for us. Before we knew it, the first crucial result was out and ten out of fifteen of us returned home to go to the Congo, while the remaining five went to Sandhurst Officer Cadet School, which is the premier officer cadet military training school in England. I definitely preferred going to Sandhurst to going to the Congo, but to the Congo I had to go. So, we returned home to Nigeria.

I was back home in Nigeria within six months, and was transferred to 3rd Battalion at Kaduna. While driving from Lagos to Kaduna to resume duty, we drove past my former school Ibadan Boys' High School (IBHS). I was in my well-ironed uniform and well-polished shoes, and wearing my new rank uniform as an officer. Co-incidentally, it was the

inter-house sports day of the school. As a sports enthusiast and in appreciation of my alma mater, I diverted without an invitation, and even participated in the old boys' race. It was a great day, with all my orderlies saluting, and the whole school cheering, the principal and all the teachers and invited guests looking at me with such joy and all shouting "Captain Alabi, Captain Alabi," I had just left them only a year and half ago. I must confess that at this point in time, being a young officer in the army was a new kind of social status which was becoming an elite sort of thing. Many people who saw me that day joined the army later.

They saw that it was a successful venture and not that of a drop-out or for the lower class of society, which had erroneously been the thought of many, particularly in the southern part of the country. My example popularised the notion that there was prospect for school leavers to start a military career as an officer, not just as a recruit. That was the extra inspiration that I gave to others but received from none except perhaps Captain Stamper. Yemi Alabi and Akinlabi among others from IBHS asked me how to join the army, and they finally did.



Sitting from left: Ignatis Obeya, Emmanuel Abisoye; British Sgt. Hasselden, Ayo Ariyo and Alabi-Isama. Standing from left, Martins Adamu, David Bamigboye, Theophilus Danjuma, Samuel Ogbemudia, Chiabi (Cameroonian) and Apolo. In 1960, the ten of us went to Mons Officer Cadet School, UK.

To the Congo

We left almost immediately for the Congo in 1961, and spent some six months. We were there to keep the peace, but there were occasions our stay wore a human face.



From right: David Bamigboye, Alabi-Isama (sitting), and Sgt. Adakole in the Congo in 1961.

For example, on one occasion, we had a soccer match organised by the United Nations for all troops in the Congo. After all the elimination games, The Nigerian Army and the Congolese Army had to play the final game in their capital city of Leopoldville, now Kinshasa. The Nigerian Army won after a very bitter battle in boots with ball. The game was very physical indeed, and the referee took sides with the Congolese host team. The referee averted his eyes when I was going to score a goal, and the Congolese player kicked me in the stomach so hard that it tore my jersey, but the referee ordered that the game should go on. Luckily for me, the Congolese player who kicked me in the stomach slipped and fell, and I took the ball away and scored the only goal of the game, making Nigeria the United Nations soccer champion of all the contingents. All these happened in front of the home crowd. The memory of this has never left me, not only because I was the captain of the Nigerian contingent but also because I learnt earlier in life, that the advantages of dishonesty, as exemplified by the referee's indiscretions are always temporary.



As captain, Nigeria won the UN soccer championship in the Congo in 1961

Helicopter, jeep and rat

Also in the Congo, we were at a town called Luluaborg, and I was a platoon commander in "A" Company, commanded by a British officer called Major Hoyle. Lt. David Bamigboye was also a platoon commander in the same company. Major Hoyle went on helicopter patrol with three other senior British officers around our area of operation. He gave me the key of his jeep so that I could pick him up at the airport on his arrival from the patrol, and that he would radio to alert me when to pick him up. However, on my way back, I picked up Lt. Bamigboye instead, and we drove round the barracks. When we caught sight of a big rat, we decided to chase it with the jeep.

After about two to three minutes of chase, the rat escaped and we fell into a ditch with the jeep. In the meantime, the helicopter of Major Hoyle and his team developed a fault, and could not continue their patrol. Another helicopter was sent to pick them up, while we tried to get the jeep repaired. The repairs of the jeep had not been completed before they arrived and Major Hoyle needed his jeep. I then explained what happened, which rightly enough made him unhappy with me. He ordered that I should lead a section of seven men to go and guard the broken down helicopter before the locals tampered with it. So, we went with seven days' rations to the helicopter site. At the sight of the helicopter, all the villagers ran away and hid as the first helicopter carried British officers. The next day, the natives realised that we were Africans, and became a little more friendly. All of them both male and female were stark naked, as they walked towards us.

Their being naked was not strange to us because in our Kaduna based 3rd Battalion training areas of Kujama, Kajuru, Koi, Keffi, and the areas around there, our people were also going naked except that our people were more civilised because they had leaves to cover both front and back, while the Congolese were just completely naked. Even in the

Eastern Region of Nigeria, with Enugu as its capital, Dr Michael Okpara, the Premier of the region put up an edict in 1963 declaring that anybody that came to Ogbete market in Enugu naked would pay a fine, and that was how second-hand clothing called, “Okrika Wake Up.” was introduced into Nigeria. The leader of the Western Region of Nigeria, Chief Obafemi Awolowo warned the people in a presidential campaign later on that the introduction of second-hand clothing into Nigeria would kill our textile industries. They hated him for that. Today, no textile mill is standing in all of Nigeria, while second-hand clothing business booms and so is unemployment.

Encounter with a hippopotamus

Then at night, there was so much noise that the natives woke us up to show us a huge animal that was marauding their village. We could not speak their language, but we both tried to make sense of the situation. Well, there was nothing we could do until a plan of counter-attack on the huge animal could be made. We wanted to know how huge and what type of animal it was. We also wanted to know its route of entry into the village. We found out that the animal was a hippopotamus, and was very huge indeed, coming out of the river. So, we laid an ambush for this huge animal with three machine guns, while the others stayed by the helicopter to guard it. We stayed awake all night, but the animal did not come, so we relaxed all day. The natives brought us their local meal made of corn and beans, and sent their best looking ladies to serve. We bowed many times to show our appreciation. For the next four days, the animal did not come, until the fifth day. When it came out of the water, it was so huge I almost ran away, but I was the officer, so I ordered the two other machine guns to open fire while I was still observing how the animal reacted to our firing. It kept coming and did not stop except that its steps slowed down a little bit. Then my men were running out of

ammunition, and while they went to get some more, I mounted the third machine gun, and aimed at the head only. The animal kept coming until it was about fifteen metres from me when it fell down. The whole village shouted for joy, and so did my men. We went back to our helicopter, while the natives were busy cutting the meat and feasting all night with drums rolled out. By daybreak, they brought us food again with lots of fried meat from the hippopotamus. It was not long after that Major Hoyle arrived to see us feasting. Nicely enough, he said, "Alabi, I sent you here for punishment, but here you are as the chief of the village."

The whole village came to wave goodbye to us. A week later, the local government of the area sent delegates to come and thank us and the United Nation troops for saving the lives of their people. Major Hoyle then ordered that I should write our experience of the situation in the Royal Nigerian Army magazine; titled, " My Encounter with a Hippopotamus in the Congo." So, with Lt. David Bamigboye, we were forgiven our offence of damaging the company commander's jeep while chasing a rat in the barracks. On my return from the Congo, I was transferred to the Nigerian Military School (NMS), Zaria in 1962 as a military tactics instructor and sports coach. I was later transferred to the 4th Battalion at Ibadan in 1964. While in the 4th Battalion at Ibadan, I was sent to Senior Officers' Tactics School at Quetta, Pakistan in 1965. The training lasted six months, and it later became very useful to me during the civil war from 1967 to 1970, because over sixty per cent of the training was based on river crossing operations. However, in January 1966, the coup that changed the future of Nigeria took place, which also dramatically affected my military career.

Politicisation of the army

Meanwhile on the political front in the country, several unhelpful situations were developing. This is an area that

was difficult, and is still difficult for me to understand and even to discuss till today. Anything and everything that was incompetently handled was called politics, and one will hear, “oh don’t worry, that is politics, you will understand one day.? I was brought up to be excellent (*Omoluwabi*), and to do things well at all times; to the extent that if I did not eat, drink or talk like an Omoluwabi, it was not acceptable to my grandmother with whom I grew up.

The pre-independence political arrangements by the colonial masters divided Nigeria into three parts - the North with over 60% of the land mass, while the East and West together amounted to less than 40%. This scenario was replicated in the major political party’s power base with the NPC (Northern Peoples Congress) in the North, AG (Action Group) in the West and NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon) mainly in the East.



Map of Nigeria showing four regions (after the 1963 plebiscite that led to the creation of the Midwest) and some of the major ethnic groups.

The NPC had an opposition party mainly based in Kano - the NEPU (The Northern Elements Progressive Union) led by Mallam Aminu Kano, and there was the party of the Benue people UMBC (The United Middle Belt Congress) led by Joseph Tarka. The party was in opposition to the NPC of the North and supported mainly by the people of Benue, and

was an ally of the Action Group in the West. All these political parties were tribal based. The NCNC, however, which was more nationally organised, though, had its stronghold mainly in the East and was Ibo-led with wide support across the country. The party had inroads to some parts of the West and wherever there were Ibo people in the country. Every party worked hard to be relevant at independence scheduled for October 1st, 1960.

How each political party was formed or by whom is not part of this book. Each party had started to go outside its main tribal home base by making in-roads into other regions. Since the AG was making waves in Benue, which was a southern part of the North, the NPC of the North also needed an ally in the South. The opportunity came after the federal elections of 1959 that decided which party would rule Nigeria in Lagos, which was then the Federal Capital, and lead Nigeria into independence in 1960. Of the 312 seats in parliament. NPC won 134 seats, NCNC won 89 seats while the AG won 73 seats. Independent candidates won the remaining 16 seats but all later crossed over to the NPC.

NPC of the North, which was alleged to have fewer Western educated people, was invited (even before all results were in) to form the government. They took control of governance because the southern-based parties, which were led by the so-called educated class with their allies, could not come together. The rivalry between the AG and the NCNC was so serious that each wanted to outdo the other. Now that the NPC was in power, they took grip of the institutions of power. From the days of the Frontier Force, about seventy per cent of all military installations were located in the much larger Northern Region — mainly in Kaduna, Kano, and Zaria. The Eastern Region had one infantry battalion based in Enugu. The West even fared better with an infantry battalion at Ibadan, another at Ikeja, and a field artillery unit at Abeokuta. The north had two

infantry battalions along with a variety of support units. Northern officers and soldiers were riding high, feeling like they were favoured. Discipline was sometimes difficult. Let me recount a story that affected me personally.

I was born at Ilorin on December 24th, 1940 to an Utagba-Uno Christian father from the Ukwuani-speaking area of the Niger Delta and an Ilorin Muslim mother. My father died when I was four years old and my mother brought me up in Ilorin as a Muslim in her Muslim family. I read the Qur'an and could speak the Hausa language of the North but not the Ukwuani dialect of my father. To further compound the situation, my maternal grandmother, Salamotu was from Pategi which is farther north. These were the conditions under which I grew up as a Muslim, and went to school as Abdul Rahman and joined the army in 1960 as Abdul Rahman Alabi. My given name from my father was Godwin Isama. But there was no way my mother could have brought a "Godwin" to her Muslim family home after my father's death. As a matter of fact, their marriage was said to have been very difficult, for a Muslim woman to marry a Christian man at that time was not acceptable; it was taboo. So they both left town to live in Ibadan in the Yoruba-speaking area of the country away from the Hausa/Nupe-speaking North. So, I joined the Nigerian Army as Abdul Rahman, an Ilorin boy and Muslim from the North.

My mother was a very strong and intelligent woman, who made good money from selling kolanuts which she transported from the South to the North and dried beef called "*Tinko*" from the North to the South. She was very popular in the town. She had a well-known and very popular cousin, a friend of the Emir of Ilorin called Alhaji Alabi Kannike, the Ubandawaki Zango of Ilorin. Her parents had horses and servants, which were the signs of affluence in those days. She was very quick witted although she did not go to school. Her father's name with whom I grew up and my

grandmother were called Adetoye and Salamotu Alabi - a very good friend of the then Emir of Ilorin as well.

I was introduced when I returned from my military training in England in 1961 at the age of 21 as an army officer, and the Emir had kind words - especially at the time when it was taboo for a good boy in Ilorin area in particular to join the army. Few Emir's children joined the army at the time. I was the first known Ilorin army officer in Nigeria and by extension, the first brigadier general in Ndokwa, my father's area in the Niger Delta as well. Therefore, becoming a "big tree" from twin roots was not too difficult to understand. I will return to this shortly. At that time, the so-called nationalist parties from the eastern and western parts of the country, that really fought for independence, which had most of the western educated people were still bickering and at each other's throats while the NPC continued to consolidate its hold on power and organised the country not only on regional, but on religious lines as well. The NCNC in particular could not believe what happened in the election results. Their resentment was blatant and that was the beginning of the crisis. To make matters worse, the census figures of 1961, the first after independence was more shocking than the election itself.

The Northern Region had a population of 29.7 million people.

The Western Nigeria had 12.7 million people.

The East had 12.4 million people.

Lagos had 665,246 people, less than a million.

The total population of Nigeria stood at about 55 million. Hell was let loose. Everybody rejected the census figures. It was cancelled in 1962 and plans made for a recount in 1963. The situation was tense all over the country, particularly the East and in the western part of the country.

At this time, by 1960 independence, Nigerian Army was less than 8,000 for a population of about 55 million. The army had very little public prestige then. They were recruited largely from the lower class and uneducated people. Little was known of the officer corps. The rank and file were mainly from the North. For instance, in Ilorin, it was a bad omen if you had a soldier in the family and here was my mother crying daily and wondering where she offended God for her only son not wanting to become a doctor, lawyer, engineer or other profession but a soldier. She believed that her enemies had cursed her, so she went from one juju man to the next, from Mallam to Mallam and Church to Church for prayers for God to forgive her sins and for me to return home. Then she met Officer Cadet David Bamigboye and I one day at Kaduna NMTC (Nigerian Military Training College) in 1960, which had just been established to enable more officers to be trained in Nigeria rather than at Teshie in Ghana, which was their traditional officer training centre. She told us to leave the army and go into business if we did not want to continue schooling, and that if we did not leave government job, the government job would leave us one day; and she was right, wasn't she? The army was a government job and we must get away from it. One was a bad child at the time to have opted to join the army instead of the railways or the banks.

At independence, there was no Nigerian army officer of a higher rank than major and most of the officers of the Nigerian Army were still British. However, as the British were leaving, Nigerian officers were being mass produced. By 1963, when the first coup in West Africa took place in a country with only 250 troops in Togo and the president was killed, the NPC government started recruiting more northern officers into the army. The westerners did not care too much about joining the army; it was done as a last resort. Awolowo's AG slogan of "Life More Abundant, Freedom for

All” was working. Doctors, lawyers, engineers and teachers particularly were needed for the free education programme, and they were being mass produced in hundreds. Why go for rigorous bush training when you can put on a tie and work comfortably in an office, was the thinking of many - a very popular one indeed.

By October 1, 1960, there were 57 Nigerian officers of whom the North had only eight, the East had 37, the West had ten. The northern ones were Maimalari, Kur Mohammed, Largema, Pam, Yakubu Gowon, Katsina and Akahan. Umaru Lawan had been cashiered earlier. Those from the West were Ademulegun, Shodeinde, Adebayo, Ogundipe, Fajuyi, Ejoor, Banjo, Olutoye, Sotomi and Obasanjo. Some of those from the East and the Midwest Ibo area of the Midwest Region were Bassey, Nwawo, Njoku, Ekpo, Okonweze, Akagha, Okoro, Brown, D.C. Okafor, Kurubo, Okwechime, Ochei, Maduebo, Keshi, Kaduna Nzeogwu, Odumegwu Ojukwu, Amadi, Aguyi-Ironsi, Imo, Ekanem, Effiong, Ogunewe, Chukwuka, Anuforo, Adigiwe, Ivenso, Anwunah, Unegbe, Ogbonnia, Eze, Ezugbana, Ude, Chude-Sokei and Aniebo.

With the Nigerianisation of the officer corps, and particularly for the northern officers, standards had to be lowered to get more northerners to join the army, since there were vacancies in the civil service also. The army had to be able to draw from a wider field of applicants. One means of doing this was to lower the standards especially the height, the build and the educational qualifications. Most of those mass produced then have left the military today, but one can still see them around, some with two left legs, some with protruding stomach (as if pregnant), some very skinny and hungry looking, some so short their training schools abroad thought they were the pigmies that they had been reading about from books on Congo basin.

Up to 1959, potential officers had to have four credits including English, in the School Certificate Examination, and a minimum of four passes at O'level in the GCE. By December 1959, this requirement was further lowered to four school certificate passes and by May 1961, the advertisement specified that as an alternative qualification, a Teachers' Grade II certificate, or the RSA (Royal Society of Arts) Examination, Stage II, would be accepted. (See advert in *Daily Express* May 15th, 1961), but all had to sit an army entrance examination and a selection board made the final decision. I had travelled to Zaria to attend army selection on a Thursday, which was the day for the Part II of my English examination in 1959 School Certificate. Before then, I had completed eight of my nine subjects already including Part I of English.

The grading then was A1, A2, C3, C4 etc. By the time the results were announced, I had returned from training at Mons Officer Cadet School in UK, and since I did eight subjects including Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Additional Mathematics (Trigonometry, Calculus, Geometry, Algebra and Arithmetic) History, Geography with C3 and C4s, and having passed the army examination which included Mathematics, English and Geography and also passed the army selection board, the army allowed me to stay. I was considered an Ilorin boy and from the North. So, I also benefitted from the lowering of standards.

As part of the programme, the maximum age for entry was raised from 22 to 25 to accommodate qualified candidates who were already serving in the army like Samuel Ogbemudia and Ayo Ariyo, my colleagues in the intake of 1960. They were already sergeants and had served about seven years or more already in the army. The Nigerian traditional military cadet training schools before our independence like Sandhurst and Mons Officers Cadet schools in UK could not take the number of cadets that

Nigeria would have liked to send for training so, some were sent to India, Pakistan, Canada, Australia, Ethiopia, and the United States of America because the need was urgent.

At home in Nigeria, the NMTC in Kaduna increased its intake and by the time of the January 1966 coup, the North already had over one third of the army officers instead of only eight at independence in 1960. When we returned from the UN operations in the Congo, I was posted to Nigerian Military School in Zaria. The school was eventually turned into a secondary school, as it was initially called "The Boys Company." I was given a rousing send-off by the British officers at the 3rd Battalion at Kaduna. I was very popular with them and they taught me many games like chess, monopoly, cluedo, and squash racket. I was the tactics instructor at the Nigerian Military School (NMS), Zaria in 1962, where I met Mr. H.H. Kirk Greene, the principal of the Institute of Administration located at Zaria. He was a very nice British gentleman, and very friendly. He was the first to inform me, before my commanding officer Major Wakeman of NMS, told me, that I would be sent on tour of the entire Northern Region to educate students in all schools about joining the army and the NMS. The recruitment drive took 60 days. This gave me a lot of opportunity to know the entire Northern Region of Nigeria.



My send-off from 3rd Battalion at Kaduna to NMS Zaria 1962. Lt. David Bamigboye (1st right standing) Lt. Emmanuel Ifeajuna (2nd left standing). I am sitting in the middle.

Any officer, who joined the army from 1962 and from the North, did so after the tour. It was almost made compulsory. It was an awareness tour and I had to explain the benefits of joining the army. The incentives included the fact that you would be able to continue your education; you would be paid a salary - especially those from primary schools not older than thirteen years, to enter NMS for four years training. You were fed free, with free uniform, free accommodation and opportunity for sports. I was the sports officer for NMS as well as their military tactics instructor. The military school won the Davies Cup as the soccer champion of all secondary schools in the North that year. So most of the schools already had an idea what NMS and its sporting prowess was. Those recruited in 1962 into NMS Zaria, were a total of 72 children not older than thirteen years of age, and included the following:



Mr Kirk Greene at Zaria, 1962.

NMF	122	-	Abdul One Mohammed	-	Late
NMF	124	-	Karimu Adisa	-	Late
NMF	125	-	Bawa Tnadah	-	Late
NMF	129	-	Adamu Alfa	-	Late
NMF	142	-	Mohammed Maina	-	Late
NMF	147	-	Ibrahim Rabo	-	Late
NMF	150	-	Sunday Ezenwa	-	Late
NMF	151	-	Godwin Dike	-	Late
NMF	159	-	Anthony Opurum	-	Late
NMF	163	-	Julius Wright	-	Late
NMF	172	-	Kola Balogun	-	Late
NMF	176	-	Lasun Odeleke	-	Late
NMF	190	-	Kenneth Onwukwe	-	Late



Some of NMS Zaria intake of 1962. Ochei is left of the British officer; and Alabi-Isama is to his right.

Of the 72 students recruited into the military school in 1962, a total of 26 are now dead and one is known to be blind while a total of 45 are still alive in one profession or the other. Among those alive, as this book was going to press are:

NMF	123	-	David Mark
NMF	126	-	Abdulkadir Babangida
NMF	127	-	Tijani Aliyu
NMF	132	-	Solomon Ogundare
NMF	139	-	Bzigu Afakriya
NMF	140	-	Jonathan Ogbaha
NMF	148	-	Emeka Okere
NMF	152	-	John Ihejiro
NMF	158	-	Paul Ndimele Omeruo
NMF	167	-	Andrew Okozala Okoja
NMF	168	-	Isaac Areola
NMF	172	-	Raji Rasaki
NMF	177	-	Isaiah Gowon
NMF	187	-	Ogbole Omugboga

They were recruited without anyone knowing their parents or on the basis of any corrupt practices. Those were the days! For instance, NMF 140 Jonathan Ogbaha, now Senator Ogbaha who was thirteen years old then cried and really wept that he was advised to talk to me by one of the other officers. He had passed all the examinations and the interviews but had failed the medical aspect of the tests. This young boy told me that the medical officer after testing his private part said that he had sexually transmitted disease, and he had never had any experience with any girl. Then I calmed him down, and asked if he went to the toilet before the test, which he confirmed. Then I knew what had happened. While we were in England, the same thing happened to me. Just before the medical test, I went to the bathroom and when I was tested, I was told that I had STD. Whatever that was. I did not know and had never heard such words before. I cried my eyes out. I was to be sent back to Nigeria. What would I tell my mother? What a shame it was

going to be for my mother who had joyously told everybody in her Ansar-ud-deen mosque to keep praying for me every Friday, that her son was abroad. But she knew better not to have said that I was in the army. Then, as God and my destiny would have it, Captain Tom, my instructor was just passing by and saw me weeping. He asked what the problem was and I told him that I was told that I had what is called STD, but I did not know what it was. It was there and then he asked if I had been to the toilet before the test and I answered, "Yes sir".

He said that something similar had happened to him also as a young man with the Scots Guards, an army unit in Scotland. He then took me by the hand and ordered a retest, which I passed.

I did the same with NMF 140 Jonathan Ogbeha. I took him by the hand, and ordered a retest of his medical examination which he passed. In today's Nigeria, I am sure the young man would perhaps have been replaced by a higher bidder in some of our institutions.

Meanwhile, with the uncontrolled killings of Ibos and their look-alikes in the North, during and after the July 1966 counter-coup, the government in its wisdom, after an international conference which is not part of this book, created Four Area Commands in order to douse the tension that was everywhere, especially in the northern region. Military people were to go to their regions of origin; Nigeria had four regions at the time — the North, the West, the Midwest and East.

First Area Command was in the North for all northerners, with the HQ at Kaduna, 2nd Area Command was for the Yorubas of the West with its headquarters at Ibadan, the 3rd Area Command was at Enugu for Ibos and all peoples of the Eastern Region, then the 4th Area Command for the people of the Midwest Region, a state that had been created out of

the Western Region by plebiscite, with headquarters in Benin City.

By July, 1966, the Hausa/Fulani officers and other men of the North, had learnt and perfected the type of Ibo-led nighttime coup of January 1966. However, the counter-coup of the northern troops was mostly in the daytime. It was at this time that my mother who was in Zaria heard of the killings in the army at Kaduna where I was. She rushed in a public transport to me at Kaduna where I was then the tactics instructor at NMTC (Nigerian Military Training College).

In the public transport, my mother sat by a couple who were speaking Ukwuani, the language of my father — a language spoken by people of Ndokwa area of today's Niger Delta area of Nigeria. This couple was shocked to see and hear an Ilorin woman with three tribal marks speaking Ukwuani language fluently. They became friendly and chatted away in the bus in which they were travelling. That again was the power of language for unity which we had failed to appreciate as a people. Then the bus was stopped at a military road block mounted by northern troops between Zaria and Kaduna, during the unrest after the coup. Right in front of my mother, these two Ibo look-alike families were dragged aside and shot dead right there. My mother said she broke down and cried uncontrollably until she got to me at Kaduna.

Chapter Two

THE TURNING POINT

My mother sat down and told me my father's story all over again, which she had told me many times before. Well, that did not mean too much to me at this time, so I asked what she wanted, and why the story? She said that she wanted help for Ukwuani people who were many in the northern part of Nigeria, to prevent their being killed the way she saw the couple killed by soldiers, and since I was an officer, she thought that it would be easy to just tell them to stop. This situation was very difficult for me, both to control and to contend with.

My mother took charge there and then. She was wondering how any human being could just be killed in broad daylight and in front of all to see and there was no person or any law enforcement agency to control the situation. She wanted to travel to report the situation to the Emir of Ilorin when she heard that all the northern Emirs were at a meeting with Lt. Col. Hassan Usman Katsina, who was the Military Governor of Northern Nigeria, based in Kaduna.

All my efforts to calm her down failed. She moved on and reported the situation as an eye witness of what happened to the two people she was chatting with on her way to Kaduna from Zaria in a public transport, to the Emir. The Emir and my mother went to the governor who, himself, was very disturbed, and expressed great concern. He issued orders right there and then that there should be no more

killings anywhere in the North and that erring officers and men would be summarily dealt with.

Then I was introduced by the Emir to Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina who said, "I know Alabi very well, he is one of my best officers and is a good sportsman". Then the Emir said, "You have to look after him as my son". From then and until his death, Lt. Col. Hassan Usman Katsina became my "guardian".

My mother then told the Emir and Lt. Col. Hassan why she was so concerned. She recalled the life of herself and my father, and then insisted she would like a situation in which I would be made responsible to look after the lives and property of the Ukwuani people. Alhaja, (which was the name I called my mother) was told that the situation was not as simple as she thought. These were the people who killed the Sardauna at his house in Kaduna, and you told me that whoever conspired to kill the Sardauna would not see Christmas. These were the people dying one by one. "Why should this concern you?" I asked. She insisted that I must help. Things were tough and there was no way I could have done anything special. She wouldn't take no for an answer as she broke down the more and wept profusely. Col. Hassan then promised to look after me as well. I was to attend a meeting with the governor the next day which was Friday August 11th, 1966.



*Alhaji Zulkarnaini Gambari
Emir of Ilorin (1959-1992)*

My mother and the 4th Area Command

In the meantime, the situation at NMTC where I was tactics instructor had become very tense. Nearly all the Ibo officers had been killed in the unrest and Lt. Ahmed Shinger had also shot one Major Ogunro, his boss. In fact, a classmate with whom I joined the army the same day and went to England for training the same day — Major Simon Uwakwe — an Iboman from Arochukwu, was shot and the bullet hit him at the back of his neck. The bullet recoiled out of his mouth and broke all his teeth, but he refused to die. He held on until he was evacuated out of Kaduna. I asked for and got the authority of the governor to evacuate all the Ibo-speaking and non-northern officers and men of NMTC by train away from Kaduna to Ibadan or Lagos. The governor accepted, and granted me authority to do so. The governor then told me of a train that was coming from Enugu the next day which was Saturday August 12th, 1966 with non-Ibo officers and men stopping at Kaduna and thence to Lagos. In this train also was Benjamin Adekunle, then Major, heading for Lagos. I got some vehicles from the transport officer of

NMTC, to transport the people to Kaduna North Railway Station, and then I got two train coaches to transport the non-northern officers and men from NMTC away from Kaduna. The coaches were ready at Kaduna North Railway Station. Those two coaches would join the train coming from Enugu at Kaduna South for their trip to Lagos or at least out of Kaduna on Sunday August 13th, 1966.



Kaduna NMTC 1965 Instructors, Alabi-Isama seated first left, Capt. Waziri seated extreme right, and Captain Ogunro.

Then the NMTC remaining officers and men, who were non-northerners, were transported to the railway station, into their coaches ready to take off from Kaduna South Railway Station, and I waited until the train left. Northern troops, I heard later, went to ambush the train at Minna Railway Station, where the train was to refresh with water and coal. Some soldiers in the train were killed, while many were wounded. Among those wounded was Major Benjamin Adekunle. But those mainly responsible for this incident were the troops of the 4th Battalion that had just arrived Kaduna on rotation from Ibadan. Their commander, Lt. Col. Abogo Largema, was killed by Ibo officers in Lagos during the January 1966 coup. They wanted revenge, which was difficult for them at Ibadan from where they were coming. By

next morning, however, I was woken up by Captain Abubakar Waziri, a colleague of mine at NMTC with a flight ticket in hand for me to catch the 8.00a.m. flight from Kaduna to Lagos and that the Head of State - then Col. Gowon would like to hold a meeting with me at 10.00a.m. I rushed off to Lagos, and on getting to Col. Gowon, I was told that the 4th Battalion troops from Ibadan were annoyed because I let all the Ibos of NMTC to escape being killed at Kaduna, and also that my ticket for the escape was paid for by the governor - Col. Hassan Katsina and that arrangements had been made for my evacuation by Lt. Col. Abba Kyari and Capt. Waziri, and that there was no scheduled meeting with Col. Gowon. It was a way of getting me out of Kaduna where the troops of 4th Battalion wanted to kill me.

The stage was then set for my move to the 4th Area Command at Benin City, or in the alternative, to just remove my uniform, resign, and become a civilian, which I thought my mother had wanted. At this stage, here was my mother who begged God to make me leave the army and for over seven years harassed me daily to do so, then telling me that I could not leave the army at that time, and that I must try to help the people of Kwale and Utagba in particular. "Alhaja" I said, "For years you had wanted me to leave the army, here we are with the opportunity to do so, and you say no; is it right?" I shouted. I said that the situation was not that clear cut as she was thinking -then she said, I should go to 4th Area Command in Benin, my area of origin. "Alhaja", I called in surprise, "Who told you about all these things?"

She said, "Don't worry, let's go". This was practically my first step towards involvement in the Nigerian civil war. So I went to 4th Area Command in Benin City on the approval of Col. Hassan Usman Katsina, in 1967.

4th Area Command

Creation of area commands

Those who planned the January 15th 1966 coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, an Ibo-speaking officer of Midwest origin, did not appraise, in depth, the consequences of failure and how the planners could handle it. The constitution was suspended and General Ironsi who took over the federal government after the coup introduced a military government for the country. So when it failed, it was beyond their ability to handle. Then came the counter-coup of July, 1966 by the northerners which succeeded, and which made all the Ibos, wherever they were in the country, to feel unsafe except in their own region of origin. This not only affected the military, it had severe political, social and economical consequences for the country. However, the federal government finally loved the unitary government as introduced by Ironsi, the reason for which he was killed and has held on to it to this day. I will like to limit myself to its impact on the military in this book. While Ibos of eastern origin moved to the East, the Midwest Ibos also moved to their region.

There was complete breakdown of law and order within the military itself, necessitating the return of soldiers to their regions of origin. By this action, a regional ethnic military structure emerged, and everybody went to his/her region of origin. The 4th Area Command was in the Midwest with its HQ at Benin City. The situation became more complicated with the northern troops that should have all moved to 1st Area Command at Kaduna remaining in Lagos and the West and refusing to quit. The West did not like that and felt occupied, as all their senior officers and politicians did not like the idea of northern troops in their midst. The West, therefore, was not too keen to join in the war effort as the war was considered as the North versus the East or the

Muslim Hausas versus the Christian Ibos. The Midwest was also neutral because of the majority of Ibo-speaking officers there. On June 18th, 1967, governor of the Midwest State, then Col. David Ejoor announced that the Midwest Region would be neutral in the unrest, even though salaries were being paid by the federal government in Lagos.

So all troops went to their area commands, where they would at least feel safe from other tribes. The army, like the political parties was now divided and set up on tribal lines. So, in order to help the Ukwuani people, I needed to go to Benin City, the HQ of the 4th Area Command. How to handle a situation like that was a puzzle to me. So, I set up a programme of action on what to do and how to go about my mission. When I got to Benin, I travelled to Kwale, There, my problem started all over again. Only my mother could speak Kwale language, I could not. It was then that I realised that the wife my mother married for me came from Ishan, in the Edo area. We never discussed where each of us came from, but we knew it was the Midwest. By the time it was further broken down to ethnic and linguistic groups, we already had three children. We were Nigerians and if I were to be specific, I was more of an Ilorinman than a Midwesterner, paternal ancestry notwithstanding.



My wife, Alhaja Muniratu Alabi-Isama.

Here in Benin City, in 1967, at the 4th Area Command, the Midwest Ibos had sympathy for the Ibos who later declared their own Republic of Biafra. Many midwesterners, were also killed in Kaduna during the unrest, and one of the leaders of the failed coup, Major Nzeogwu, was also a midwest Ibo. However, the troops and the ibos in the 4th Area Command did not trust me, as I was seen as a northern Hausa spy. I was not comfortable. Besides, this was not a situation to carry family around, and since my wife was Ishan, and non-Ibo, her situation was made much better. So, I left her with her parents who had since moved from Ibadan in the heat of the uprising, to Benin.

Now, at this Area Command in Benin, I came face to face with the Ibo officers who had once lied against me at 4th Battalion in Ibadan - particularly Major Amadi who occupied my allotted married officers' quarters for free, while I paid rent, with a wife and three children. I then had to move into singles quarters of one bedroom which was allotted to him as a single officer. He found vacancy at the married officers' quarters and occupied it before my arrival in my station. He

could only do that because he was senior to me. He was a major while I was a captain; but I refused to be cheated. When he was finally ordered to pack out of the house - hell was let loose on me by some Ibo-speaking officers in the barracks including some Ibo soldiers. We distrusted each other; Major Akagha and Captain Ohanehi, and the other Ibo officers in the 4th Battalion, sided with Major Amadi on the issue of the married quarters. On this issue, they did not behave as senior officers, and I was surprised.

I think the Ibo officers were antagonistic because they hated my guts. So, I went to Major Akagha who was the acting battalion commander, and whom I had never met before to explain the issue of the married quarters. By the next morning, Akagha, another Ibo officer, was already accusing me of insubordination. I was shocked. I had only gone to explain the situation to him as the most senior officer in station. I was in real trouble until Lt. Col. Abogo Largema, the substantive commander arrived from leave and ordered Major Amadi to move out of my quarters at once. Lt. Col. Largema heard my story all over again and there and then ordered that I should move into my married quarters right away, for I had already paid rent for one month with someone else living there. From there on, it was Ibos at 4th Battalion versus the rest.



Alabi-Isama (backing camera) and Lt. Col. Abogo Largema, Commander 4th Battalion at Oshogbo in 1965.

I did not know that the unit was divided on tribal lines, as I was previously at the NMS where such things never existed. Then, there was the Oshogbo incident with the same Major Amadi. During the unrest in the West after the allegedly rigged elections and the disputed census, Major Amadi, who was in charge of Oshogbo area, was said to have been fraternising with the opposition. I was called to take over the unit from him.

Well, I was too young to know who was right or wrong and all I was ordered by the commander to do, was to keep law and order in the area. I was lucky to meet representatives of both warring parties at the Oba's palace when I went to pay him a courtesy call. I was received and both parties were introduced to me. I used my vehicle to take both parties to their homes. My aim was to get to know their homes should it be necessary to reach any one of them. My being friendly paid off, and there was no problem or fighting in the area

throughout my period of operation there. My commanding officer, Lt. Col. Abogo Largema was very pleased with me.

Suddenly, I saw my commander early in the morning, as early as 6.00a.m. He must have left Ibadan that morning at about 4.00a.m. I had just returned from patrol and because most problems began at night, I was there every night with the troops. He said that he was shocked to see me coming back from patrol at that time because he had been told that I was never in station with my troops, and decided to find out himself. Major Amadi did not know that the commander was with me personally that morning. He went to Lt. Col. Largema at about noon the same day, to say that he saw me in town in Ibadan at 9.00a.m. The commander who came with a photographer showed him the picture taken when he came to see me personally that morning. After that, all the Ibo officers went cold in the unit.

My friends at 4th Battalion in Ibadan were mainly non-Ibo officers — Captain S.F. Daramola, Lt. Ibrahim Bako, Lt. Garba Paiko, Lt. M.M. Magoro, and the commanding officer, Lt. Col. Abogo Largema, an outstanding officer who loved my work, my sporting activities and my contributions at meetings. I was a company commander with 2nd Lt. George Innih, 2nd Lt. Edet Utuk, and Lt. Magoro as my deputies. 4th Battalion was always the sports champion in the brigade in athletics, soccer and boxing. But as fate would have it, here I was in the same 4th Area Command with Ibo officers with no love lost between us. The mistrust was mutual. However, my mission was to find my father's people, to obtain signatures of their chiefs and elders that they supported the federal government and one Nigeria. But how to achieve this was another problem, for which I needed to make plans.



4th Battalion sportsmen — Champions in the brigade. Alabi-Isama is seated eighth from left.

Moses and the Red Sea

There was this dilemma in November, 1966 at Benin City. The northern troops were still looking for me because they thought that I had gone to join Biafra, after I had let the surviving Ibos at NMTC escape by train. On the other hand, the ibos in the Midwest Area Command did not trust me. They were suspecting me as a spy for the North. I was in a fix about what to do. Since there was not much by way of troops operations, I concentrated on sports and we built up a football team that played all over the Midwest against the police, schools and clubs. I was coach and player. That gave me the time to get to meet all those that I had to meet to achieve results. I needed to travel extensively in Kwale area to get to know the people, my father's people in particular and the village of Ikilibi, Utagba-Uno. I had never been there before.

My main mission

In order to do all these, I needed a vehicle, a guide that knew the area very well, and an interpreter, since I could not speak the language. Suddenly, the name of one Mr. Martins Nwoseh came to my mind. I met this gentleman at Kaduna when I was a cadet at NMTC in 1960. He was working with a construction company called G. Cappa Ltd. He had met my mother and sister at Kaduna market and found out that they spoke Kwale dialect. Right there and then they all spoke the language and became friendly. That power of language

again! As the people of the area always said, it was always fascinating to see an Ilorin woman with three Yoruba tribal marks, speaking Ukwuani, the language of the area. It was not usual, and of course, she also had a likeable character and was very generous with gifts. I did not know of anyone who knew my mother and never had a gift or two from her, or had not eaten her meal at one point or the other. Mr. Nwoseh had a Volkswagen car with which he taught me how to drive in Kaduna then. We all became friendly.



Mr Martins Nwoseh, an assistant with G.Cappa Limited (1966).

I ran into Mr. Martins Nwoseh again in Benin City in 1966 where his construction company had a job on hand. He had also left Kaduna during the unrest there. I told him all my problems and my plan of achieving results and wondered what he would advise me to do and how to go about it. Mr. Nwoseh then went and got permission from his company for two weeks off duty to enable him assist me in my mission. He also introduced me to his boss and told him my story. He

was very sympathetic and advised on how to go about the mission. Within some minutes, he ordered that some documents be prepared while he offered me tea. He got all the necessary documents required from his boss and from the military authority. We were set for the trip. He then took me around Kwale villages to meet the chiefs, including Baba Edike, the Okparuku of Ikilibi, Utagba-Uno and what he called Okpara-Ukus. We drove round talking to them to support the federal government efforts at keeping Nigeria one. The people thought that I must be mad, and talking rubbish, as most of them had suffered the same fate as eastern Ibos, during the unrest in Northern Nigeria, and they were poised for war.

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Out Ref: _____ Your Ref: _____		
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT MR. MARTINS NWOSEH, IS AN EMPLOYEE OF THIS COMPANY AND WORKS AT OUR IDDO OFFICE.		
IDENTIFICATION:- SURNAME: NWOSEH OTHER NAMES: MARTINS BORN: 11th JULY, 1935 PLACE OF BIRTH: LAGOS HOME TOWN: UGBIR - KWALE, DELTA PROVINCE, NIGERIA STATE. LANGUAGE SPOKEN: URUWASI/ IDDO EMPLOY: SENIOR ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT. FIRST EMPLOYED: 5th May, 1953.		
G. CAPPA LIMITED BUILDING CONTRACTORS <i>O. Nwoseh</i>		

Mr Martins Nwoseh's ID card issued by G.Cappa Limited.

Then, the big question. What was my name? My name is Major Abdul Rahman Alabi! "Nonsense," the chief roared. "Abdul keh? So you brought a Hausaman to come and talk to us about one Nigeria?" They asked Mr. Nwoseh at the town meeting which was organised for me to meet the people. We had started wrongly. What was necessary was to find my own people, identify with them first and then move on from

there. So we embarked on finding my father's village which we finally did. We got to Utagba-Uno on a market day, which they call Eke market day. Mr. Martins Nwoseh stopped his car and stopped a lady to ask for Isama's family if any. As luck and fate would have it, the lady happened to have been my father's second wife, whom my mother had told me about, and that her name was Beatrice and that I loved her very much when I was a little boy of three.



My second visit to Baba Edike, Okparuku of Ikilibi, after the war in 1970.

My mother was not interested in my soccer games and sports in Benin. I must stop the killing of her husband's people, period. So she moved to Benin from Lagos and from there to Utagba-Uno to live with my father's people. This Ilorin woman with three tribal marks meant business. In the meantime, the lady we met at the market then asked why we were interested in Isama's family. Mr. Martins Nwoseh spoke Ukwuani language. He told her that I was looking for my father's people and one Mama Beatrice, just as my mother had told me. The lady asked me to get down from the car, which I did. She looked at my right foot, alas, there is a white birth mark which she recognised. She shouted at the market place and in seconds people gathered. Then she called my name "Godwin" which I answered. Then she told

us that she was the Beatrice that Mr. Nwoseh asked of. She cried and told people standing around all about me. She told us to wait while she went to her house nearby and brought out a picture of myself and herself, when I was four years old. She said that when my father died, she returned to the village while my mother went to her family in Ilorin.



*Alabi-Isama, eight months old with my mother
1941*



*Alabi-Isama four years old with Mama Beatrice
1944*

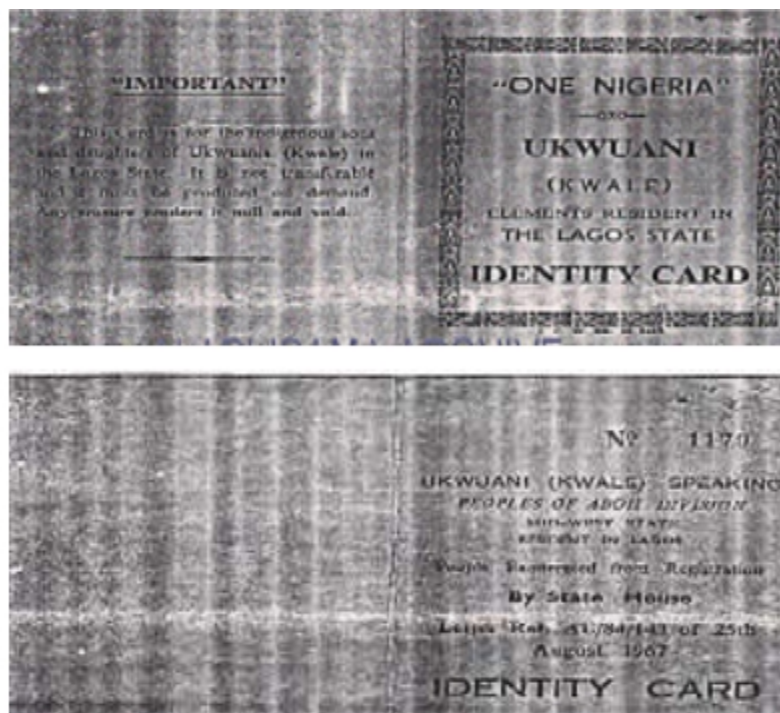


*Mr Martins Nwosch's ID card issued by
the Ukwuani community in Lagos.*

She spoke Yoruba very fluently - it was a highly emotional moment for everybody. She was weeping, and so were some of the onlookers. I told the story all over again of what my mother wanted me to achieve. At that point, I could no longer be Major Abdul Rahman. We had to go to the court house in November 1966 at Kwale where I swore to an affidavit for a change of name to Major Godwin Alabi-Isama and published the change of name in the newspaper, while an official copy was sent to the Army HQ at 4th Area Command, and to Lagos. From then on I became a son of the soil. My mission had to start in earnest. All the suspicion of being a northern spy was laid to rest. The Governor, Lt. Col. David Ejoor was very kind indeed and made sure that I was comfortable and I was allowed to travel round Kwale area on my mission.

My mother was never going to take 'No' for an answer. As noted, she moved bag and baggage to Utagba-Uno and as she said, "to live and die there, to show you that I mean business". We went from town to town for about six weeks, and Mr. Martins Nwoseh drove all the way. I finally received signatures from chiefs in Kwale and the entire Aboh province as a whole supporting the federal government. On September 23rd 1967, all these were announced on local radio, the Midwest radio and TV and the Federal Radio in Lagos. I went back to Benin City to resume my duty at the 4th Area Command. As there was not much to do, I resumed my soccer training of the troops and touring the Midwest. Then there was the reorganisation of the 4th Area Command in which troops were deployed around the region. Curiously, more troops were deployed to guard Lagos road, than at Asaba facing the rebels, but not one of the officers accepted to be transferred to the Asaba end. The government ordered that Asaba/Onitsha bridge linking the Eastern Region with the Midwest be closed to traffic going to the East, but this was not done as the Ibo officers from the Midwest who

formed the majority of the senior officers of the Midwest region made it impossible for this order to be implemented. The most senior officer in the 4th Area Command was Col. Conrad Nwawo, also an Ibo. There was clearly a showdown. What has to be done? At this time I looked for Major Amadi. I was told that he had gone back to the Eastern Region and that he only came for a meeting with the commander of 4th Area Command Col. Nwawo.



Identification required to move around the Midwest during the war by Mr Martins Nwoseh.

Governor Ejoor decided to visit Asaba with a view to seeing things for himself and confirm that the 4th Area Command under the command of Lt. Col. Nwawo, failed to implement the order to close the bridge to traffic. Having confirmed this fact, the governor sent some officials of the Ministry of Works to block the bridge, which they did. But this created tension between the army and the governor. The Ibo officers of the Midwest were over 70% of the entire officers in the command. Under the circumstances the

governor could not get his orders obeyed by the 4th Area Command that no traffic should cross the Niger Bridge at Asaba to the East.

Ibo officers frequently crossed at will and went to the rebel HQ in Enugu, a four hour drive from Benin City, all on the pretext of going to see their families at weekends in Asaba, during which they would then cross over to Enugu. Since no officer wanted to be posted there, and many were flouting the governor's orders, I volunteered to be transferred to Asaba to guard the bridge with a company of about 100 troops posted there as part of a battalion with its HQ at Agbor under the command of Major Henry Igboba, also an Ibo-speaking officer.



Alabi-Isama and Governor Ejoor at Benin City

Chapter Three

POSTING TO ASABA

The situation at the time in Asaba was not only dangerous but nasty for the 4th Area Command. Lt. Col. Trimnel had earlier been transferred to guard the Asaba Bridge but he was sick with a knee problem and was limping, so he complained, but no one listened. Lt. Col. Trimnel was not even an infantry officer, he was of the supply and transport. Meanwhile, Cols. Nwawo and Okwechime, Major Ochei and many more of the Ibo-speaking officers of the 4th Area Command refused to guard the bridge against Biafra. Col. Nwawo was the most senior Nigerian Army officer in the Midwest, so he was the Commander of the 4th Area Command. Meanwhile, all the non-Ibo speaking officers of the 4th Area Command were given one type of diversionary job or the other. For instance, Major Sam Ogbemudia, in order to keep him away from pure infantry duties was appointed quartermaster. Another non-Ibo-speaking officer was Major Pius Eromobor who was appointed intelligence officer. It was then I went to the commander, Col. Conrad Nwawo, to volunteer to replace Lt. Col. Trimnel at the Asaba sector.

I was a major then. So he agreed and I moved to Asaba the next day. On July 25th, 1967, my mother came to Asaba on a visit from Utagba-Uno to see me. It then dawned on her the magnitude of the problem and for the first time, a feeling of guilt took hold of her; but I made her comfortable and said that was how the Lord wanted it. At Asaba, I had a deputy, Captain Joseph Isichei who was Ibo-speaking but his loyalty was in doubt. Most of the Ibo officers would travel to

Asaba, allegedly their hometown, but would not bother to call on me as the commander on ground. Reports reached me that they were with Isichei who sometimes travelled back and forth to Enugu with them. But my orders were not to allow Biafrans cross the bridge at Asaba. I had a company of about 100 men, mostly non-infantry. They were engineers, drivers, mechanics and in the medical corps. So the troops were mixed and I had to set up a training programme for them on weapons and tactics including river-crossing operations and swimming. Another deputy with me was Lt. Larry Koinyan, an air force officer who gave me accurate information on the movements of these officers. Lt. Koinyan was a very loyal and honest officer who made my command and control of Asaba area very successful.

I had made some friends in the town, since I could not speak the language, to keep me posted on the goings-on. I met many people at the local high school nearby, called St. Patrick's College, Asaba, just to play tennis and gossip. I was there every evening with one Mr. Dibia, the high school sports coach and a lady called Joy Ogbogu and their friends. I heard more of the goings-on from these lawn tennis players, and many of them wanted to meet the new army commander of the area. That was fine and I made many friends and went to their homes, where I was usually well entertained. The battalion was commanded by Major Igbo, also Ibo-speaking, with his headquarters at Agbor. On August 7th, 1967, he told me that there would be a meeting of senior officers from major and above with Lt. Col. Ejoor, the governor, at 9.00a.m. on August 9th, 1967 in Benin. In order to make the 9.00a.m. time, (Asaba to Benin was about two hours trip at the time), I had to leave the day before and sleep in Benin. The driver, Ajasco, an Ibo-speaking soldier had asked if he should go and get the Land Rover jeep ready with petrol, oil and lubricants and service the vehicle, which I agreed to. I was to leave at 6.00 p.m. for Benin on August

8th, 1967. Just as I was getting ready to leave, an old lady friend of mine while I was at Kaduna NMTC, who ran away from Kaduna with her parents to Enugu during the uprising at Kaduna, showed up at exactly 6.00p.m. at my door at the Catering Rest House. You can imagine your old friend showing up at that time and in such a situation.

While I was welcoming her with *'long time, no see'* and getting romantic, she started talking about being a friend of a Biafran officer who was going to be the point unit commander heading for Lagos and that Biafran troops would cross at 10.00p.m. that night and were to race to arrive Lagos at 5-6.00a.m. before the traffic rush hour. One unit would take over the radio station at Benin by 12 midnight while the bulk of the troops would advance to Lagos. The troops would then advance immediately to capture the airport. Then other troops would get to Lagos by air. The most important point, however, was that most Midwest troops were Ibo-speaking, that all road blocks had been changed with specially selected Ibo-speaking soldiers — right from Asaba to Benin and the Midwest border with the Western Region. She said it was discussed that I could be the only obstacle to Biafra achieving results of getting to Lagos if I should attack the Biafran troops at Asaba; which would alert Benin and Lagos. Then the bombshell! As she was talking, she started running back to the waterside.

“Well, why don’t you stop and talk to me? Haba! Why are you running away from me after all these days?” I pleaded.

She did not stop. Then as I ran after her and got to the waterside, her boat was waiting with the boatman sitting inside. Then she turned back, held my hand and dragged me to a corner and told me that I, Alabi-Isama, was their only problem. I was to be killed and not to be captured. That was what she heard at a meeting at her friend’s house. She had to get back before it was too late. It was already 6.30p.m.

Then she ran into her waiting boat and left. Two of my lady informants, based at the Onitsha end of the bridge also showed up at about 7.15p.m., to report that Biafran troops were massing up at the bridge head, and that they suspected they were going to cross Onitsha/Asaba bridge that night.

That did it. I ran back to the unit. Usually, the troops that were not on duty would have gone to town. I was shocked to see Capt. Joe Isichei fully dressed in battle dress and armed. He told me that he was just coming to see me since he knew I was to travel to Benin that night. He advised against travelling that night as it was too late. Furthermore, it could be dangerous if I had a flat tyre or if the vehicle malfunctioned. To avoid such dangers with night travel, I should wait and travel in the morning of August 9th, 1967. He also informed me that he had doubled the number of my security guards and checked all road blocks up to and including Agbor and that all troops were correct and positioned.

I was very calm as if I had not known nor heard anything. He suggested that I should travel to Benin in the morning at about 6.00am. He had told Ajasco my driver that he should go to his (Ajasco) house with my jeep and pick me up at 5.30a.m. for the 6.00a.m. trip because Ajasco's house was far from mine and that he could find it difficult to reach me on time in the morning as there would not have been any taxi or means of transportation at that time.

Then I asked, rhetorically, "You did all that?"

He said, "yes", and I thanked him. That was about 8.00p.m. Then why did he give arms to the troops and issue ammunition? Well, since I was travelling and it was my first time leaving station, he was not sure what might happen at night. That was why he also suggested that I should travel in the morning.

“Fine”, I said.

There and then, I immediately ordered that I should sign for a sub-machine gun (SMG) with 50 rounds of ammunition and four grenades for the SMG. Besides, I wanted all my security withdrawn. He did not believe what he had heard.

“Yes, remove all my security,” I ordered.

In my mind, I had to create room for battle. I had to make a quick mental assessment of the situation. Most of the troops were Ibo-speaking and Capt. Isichei was in battle dress. If my guards remained, there could be crossfire and I could be killed and there was the possibility that they were even sent to kill me, as he (Isichei) had tampered with my guards. With all these going through my mind, I had to convince myself that I could not fight in a crowd. So, I ordered that all my guards be removed at once. At about 8.30p.m., all troops in my area including the road block at the Catering Rest House gate were withdrawn. I told Isichei to use them to reinforce the troops at the bridgehead. I just did not trust that the troops would not kill me in the crossfire if there was really an attack by the Biafrans. Then a drama ensued between Captain Isichei and me. He asked if I was not going to need a guard and I said no.

He said, “Biafrans are coming and you need security; you cannot be alone!”

“Ah, so you know that Biafrans are coming? I have my security, I am not alone.”

He asked, “Where are they?”

I said, “Jesus”. Then I said, “Oh! welcome, Holy Spirit! He has strengthened me, look at Angels. See Gabriel, Michael and Raphael”. Then I added, “You better believe me that they are all here”.

Then he started telling the troops around, "You see, Yorubaman, he is afraid".

I repeated almost immediately, "My security is here, do not worry about me".

They all laughed hysterically. I knew that this officer had some bugs in his pants about me.

"Nobody laughs at my God," I said, adding that I was not travelling that night anymore.

I thanked him for advising me not to travel that night. I was then more determined to fight this man or whoever would be concerned. I was now the last line of battle and I needed God, my wits and energy to see me through. I knew that I had to fight like hell and with utter intensity to get out alive. This time it was not a fight for Nigeria, it was whether I would see my mother again. She just left me a few days ago, on August 5th, 1967. Was that a send-off?

I went into the radio room, and sent messages to Major Igboba, my battalion commander at Agbor, another to 4th Area Command HQ at Benin with copy to AHQ Lagos as a situation report on the information received, and I quoted Capt. Isichei as the informer.

I then told 4th Area Command HQ at Benin that I was not travelling that night again as scheduled for the meeting next morning with the governor at 9.00a.m. on August 9th, 1967. One Mr. Oritsejafor was the police commander at Asaba. I took a taxi to his house, since my deputy had told my driver to take the vehicle away. I told him all the stories and asked him to alert the police and to send signal message to his HQ at Benin City. I told him that I had also sent situation reports to the Army HQ at Benin City and Lagos. This time, I was quoting Isichei again, and what he told me might happen that night and that was why I was not travelling to Benin City again that evening. He took me back

to my place at the Catering Rest House in his vehicle. At the time of going to press with this book, that Catering Rest House at Asaba has transformed to the Grand Hotel. I showed him some few tricks with my SMG which was loaded with ammunition. When he wanted to take the SMG from me to practise, he almost shot me as one bullet flew out. He had pressed the trigger without the safety catch. He quickly returned the weapon and left.

Action time

I did not wear any uniform. I put on a track suit as if going for sports. It was about 9.30p.m. It was about time for action, for the soldier in me was starting to stir. My life and what would become of my very dear mother were at a delicate balance. What would happen that night might well make a world of difference. My mother would either be hugging me or crying over my dead body, lying helplessly on the ground somewhere. I knew that she would just go and kill herself. I sent another radio message to Benin on the intelligence report, as I put it, and told all the stories of a likely 10.00p.m. attack if the report was true and that Lagos was the target and I would stay and not travel that night in spite of the fact that I had gotten the permission to leave my station at 6.00p.m. for Benin on August 8th, 1967. I also quickly made few telephone calls to chief of police in Benin, Igboba, my commanding officer at Agbor and the 4th Area Command Headquarters in an urgent radio message for action. I was living at Baba Bazuaye's house at 10, Airport Road, Benin City. My family and my mother just travelled there. I called him to inform my family that I was not coming to Benin that night any more until the next morning. The messages quickly went round although I was not able to call all those whose telephone numbers I knew.

I called Lt. Col. Nwawo, the army commander at Benin which ought to have been the duty of my commanding

officer. I did not get Ogbemudia and Trimnel on the telephone. It was about 9.45p.m. of August 8th, 1967.

At exactly 10.00p.m., there was a knock on my door which was well locked, but was a glass door. "Who is there?" I asked. The voice said that he wanted the commander and I said that the commander had travelled to Benin. Another voice said, *Na him voice be that* (meaning that is his voice). Immediately I opened the curtain a little. I looked from the wall side of the glass door and saw about 10 or so troops in Biafran uniform. They opened fire, which shattered the glass door. I had four grenades and my SMG was slung round my back. Just as they rushed forward to charge into the room through the broken and shattered door, I lobbed the first grenade through the shattered glass door. With the intensity of the firing into the room I knew then that they meant to kill me. Having understood the danger of my situation, I had to fight ruthlessly. I had no options left but God and miracle could get me out. Like Nigerian politics of recent, it was a 'do-or-die' affair. My grenade landed very well and on target, and I heard "*Chineke!*" When an Iboman shouts "*Chineke!*" meaning "Oh God", then you know he has had it. Then I threw the second one further as I opened the door and saw some running away, I followed with some bursts from my SMG. There were bodies all over the floor and some still crying. I had to make sure that no one was alive, to avoid anyone chasing me afterwards. I locked the door, I looked out through the bathroom window and luckily for me, the Biafrans never thought of guarding the back of the house - how stupid!! Possibly, my destiny did not let them think of that. So, I jumped out with a grenade in my left hand and SMG in my right hand. I was expecting to attack whoever could be waiting out there. There was no one and so I jumped out of the bathroom window.

As there were no troops guarding me, since they had been withdrawn earlier in the day, I had a free run to the main

road. Then there was Ajasco with my Land Rover jeep. He asked, "Oga what happened? Biafrans have entered! I was coming from the Cable Point. They have killed a lot of Hausas there at Ogbe Hausa, and I also heard some firing around your house and I thought I should come and see you."

"Well" I said, "it was nice of you to have come, but I was told by Captain Isichei that you live very far away from here."

Ajasco said his house was just by the Catholic Church which was only five minutes walk from the Catering Rest House, but he took the Land Rover to the barracks. At this point, we saw lots of lights from Biafran vehicles crossing the bridge; all my troops were cheering and jubilating. I told Ajasco to head for Agbor. As he turned round, there was firing and bullets hit the Land Rover. Ajasco jumped out and I was left alone in a moving jeep, but because he was making a turning at the time, the steering locked and the vehicle stopped.

I jumped into the driver's seat and drove to Agbor. On the way, I called at the District Officer's house at Ibusa to alert him, but he did not open the door despite all my hard knocks, so I drove to Mama Onwuemezie's house, a family friend of ours at Boji Boji, Agbor, and I told her all that had happened. She had just returned from a Papal visit to Rome, so she still had Pope's Holy Water, which she sprinkled on my head, and she told me to kneel down with her children, Mrs. Amechi, the Oriuwe of Agbor and Lucy Onwuemezie, and Mildred. She prayed for me, and I left. All I told them was to stay quiet at home. I called Major Igboba who was my battalion commander to meet me at the police station. There was no sign of any defence or that my intelligence information was received. He confirmed the receipt of my report but that he had not enough troops to defend Agbor.

Hmm! I was at the police station at Agbor, making telephone calls to Lt. Col. Trimnel, a few more that I could remember their telephone numbers and then to my mother.

As I was speaking with my mother, the line went off. I briefed Igboba to get the troops ready for defence at least to delay the Biafrans until morning and forestall their plan for 12.00 midnight entry into Benin and 6.00a.m. entry into Lagos. He said he would advise that we should rather surrender, as he did not think that we could stop the Biafran advance into Benin and Lagos. He did not have enough troops for defence, he kept on repeating.

"But sir, I called you at about 9.30p.m." I said and insisted, "I will not surrender." I restated my point that the aim was not to stop or defeat the Biafrans but to delay their entry into Benin until daybreak and also to deny them entry into Lagos in the morning rush hour. Then I looked at him in the face and said "Sir, if you see my hands up, it will be in prayers, saying Halleluiah and in thanksgiving to God Almighty, not in surrender." Major Igboba finally surrendered to the Biafran troops who did not trust him and put him in prison at Benin City. When the federal troops captured Benin City, they saw Major Igboba and beheaded him.

I then wrote a report in the police book. The battalion at Agbor did not plan any defence of Agbor; neither did the entire 4th Area Command for the defence of Benin City.

"Oh God", I said in frustration. I needed to talk to my mother. The telephone line was difficult.

I wrote another report at the police station notebook again to say that Major Igboba ordered me to surrender and I refused. The policemen on duty heard it all, and so one of the policemen told me that the P & T (the telephone company) people disconnected the line. The P & T (Posts & Telegraphs) office was just a short distance away from the

police station where I was making my entries in their police report book. I got into my Land Rover jeep and drove there to find Biafran soldiers in a Peugeot 404 station wagon disconnecting telephone lines at the exchange. The Biafran driver saw the Land Rover jeep and decided to chase me. With a 404 Peugeot station wagon, I had no chance of going too far in a Land Rover before he would catch up with me. But I had two grenades left as well as my machine gun (SMG). I looked and saw that the driver was alone in the 404 Peugeot station wagon chasing me. I was pleased with that. The driver caught up with me at last as expected. Nigeria was driving on the left side of the road at the time, so my steering wheel was to the road on the right and so was the Biafran 404 station wagon. For him to catch me, he would have to disable my vehicle.

I was not sure what type of weapon he had. I stopped and he stopped by my right side rather than in front to block me. That was fine. I made a quick mental appreciation of how to attack him. He came out from the right side of his vehicle, and then walked to the front of his vehicle to come and meet me.

He had only SMG which he pointed at me. That was fine. If he was holding a grenade, it would have been a different fight. As the driver came closer and with my engine still running, I had to throw my grenade in such a way that it must kill him and also disable his vehicle. My vehicle was on the reverse gear. As he came close enough and not too far from his vehicle, I released the grenade which blew him and his vehicle up into pieces. It was about 12.30a.m and the Biafran troops at the P & T at Agbor had no vehicle to advance. These attacks at Asaba and at Agbor further delayed the enemy and they were very cautious of their movement thereafter. I had achieved my aim of not allowing the Biafrans to arrive Benin City at midnight and so they could not arrive Lagos at 6.00a.m. as they had planned.

Biafrans entered Benin City without any shot being fired other than the Asaba and Agbor attacks. The only firing that took place at Benin City was at the Governor's House, which was the residence of the Governor, Lt. Col. David Ejoor.

The guard commander was then Captain Sunny Tuoyo, whose troops opened fire at the Biafrans entering the Government House. They were only about 15 men. Despite the early warning I gave the 4th Area Command headquarters, there was no plan to stop or attack the Biafrans. All the officers and men; I repeat, all the officers and men of the 4th Area Command with the headquarters at Benin City melted away and took cover. The Ibo-speaking ones that the Biafrans had depended on for success at Benin ran away as well. Officers like Ochei and Isichei went and joined Biafran troops immediately. Ogbemudia and some non-Ibo speaking officers like Charles de Gaulle of France, who went to join the British troops during the WW2, eventually went to join the federal troops. The governor himself fled and so, Benin City was left at the mercy of Biafran troops. I could have been sacrificed, but God did not allow it. I turned and went to Sapele instead of going to Benin City. I drove all night. I bought fuel at Obiaruku and moved on to Sapele. I reported to Mr. Okonofua, the chief police officer at about 4.00a.m. Mr. Okonofua asked if he could lay an ambush with his five men at the station. I discouraged him from doing that. He also told me that he had made a report that his deputy was an Ibo-speaking person and was always travelling at weekends, so he could not keep me in his house.

He took me to a nearby church where I was until 6.00a.m. when church members started coming in. I used his telephone to call my mother again and assured her that I was fine, that I was in Sapele with Mr. Okonofua who was a long time family friend when he was a police sergeant at Ilorin. I was then a schoolboy picking tennis balls for him

and, sometimes, he would allow me to play tennis against him. I knew that he was at Sapele because my football team, while in Benin, had played against his police team in Sapele stadium. Baba Bazuaye told me that Col. Ejoor, the governor, was at his house (10 Airport Road) and that he would take him to the Catholic Church next door. The church people at Sapele where Mr. Okonofua took me started looking at me suspiciously. I told him to get me a football which he did since I was still wearing a track-suit.

I went out of the church when Mr. Martins Nwoseh arrived at Sapele from Benin. How did you know I was here? He had called my mother at Baba Bazuaye's house when he heard about the attack at Asaba and he was told that I was fine and that I called from Okonofua's office at Sapele. He took me to Ikilibi Utagba-Uno in his car. Biafran troops were driving through with many vehicles. I had abandoned my Land Rover at Sapele with the police. Mr. Okonofua and Mr. Martins Nwoseh were also at Kaduna when I was a cadet at NMTC. They were the only people that I knew in town, where I could go for a weekend visit. However, the Biafran troops were still around in the area. Mr. Martins Nwoseh took me to Chief Dafe who was the foremost politician of the area. I was welcomed and he wondered why I was on my mission.

I told him the whole story all over again. He told me point blank that I must be kidding or mad. He came just short of saying stupid and that he would not declare for the federal government and that there was no army in the whole of Black Africa that could defeat Biafra. He was repeating what he had told me on July 23rd when I went to ask for his signature in support of the federal government, and that I had received signatures from all the chiefs in Aboh Province, I showed him the letter. At this time, the Biafran troops had captured the Midwest and were heading for Lagos. It was September 24th, 1967.

Then he started to lecture me on the type of weapons that had been developed by Biafran scientists. He further reminded me that the best officers of the Nigerian Army were in Biafra, including Major Nzeogwu. He tried to mention all their names - he was right.



The letter with the signatures of Chiefs of Abok
Province in support of Federal Government
of Nigeria 23rd September, 1967.

Chief Dafe then, went on to ask me which officers of the Nigerian Army could face these officers in battle. He spoke at length and refused to declare for the federal government. I then requested if I could ask some questions which he confidently agreed to. I started by saying that I had three questions, because in all my training, weapons were the least of problems in any war situation. The first question was for him to tell me which foreign government would recognise Biafra and if any had done so yet. He told me not to worry, that they would, that no country in the world would listen to their stories of pogrom and genocide with pictures to back them up and not be moved. He listed the names of all

people of importance and honour who were Nigerian ambassadors and eminent people like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Eni Njoku, Michael Okpara, Akanu Ibiam, to name a few.

Who in Nigeria could match the stature of these people? Again he was right. The members of Gowon's cabinet could not match the stature of these people. The second question was about logistic support - food, medicine and so on. He answered that a considerable amount of food and medicines were waiting to be loaded from the western world, and that because 90% of the Ibos were Catholics, the Pope himself was waiting for the request from Odumegwu Ojukwu, to send in aid. My third question was whether there would be peace if Gowon changed Ojukwu and appointed another governor for the East. Straightaway he said, "No way, we are poised for war." He said, "Look, the Biafrans have captured Midwest so easily, and so, the West was waiting to surrender like Midwest did". We left him and we went to Ikilibi, Utagba-Uno. That was about 11.00a.m. I was received cautiously. My mother had arrived from Benin City, and was with my wife and children. For some reason, the Biafran troops were bogged down in Benin and could not get to Lagos, which was their objective.

Biafra's first military blunder

What I did not understand as an army officer was how on earth Biafran troops got to Sapele and Warri! What would they have been looking for there? What tactics or strategy was that? One would have thought that the Biafrans had an aim and a plan to achieve it. To my mind, if I were in the Biafran High Command and Lagos was my objective, what would be my aim? Biafran entry into the Midwest was to my mind a military blunder. There were better objectives than Benin and Lagos. What about Benue? The Benue River would have given Biafra a very good line of defence to the North. The Biafrans depended on the Midwest Ibo officers

who in the end were not helpful to their cause. A traitor is always a traitor, and what you compromise to get, in the end you lose. Some of the Midwest senior officers that sold out and went to join Biafra were, Lt Cols. Conrad Nwawo, Okwechime, Ben Nwajei, Igboba, Ochei, and the worst of them all, Capt. Joe Isichei. All these officers had appointments in Biafra; some even commanded Biafran troops in battle. These officers had their parents and families at Asaba and their hometowns in the Midwest, but they were fighting for Biafra across the Niger where most of them were later relieved of their duties in Biafra as saboteurs, including Ben Nwajei at the Owerri front.

The man called Achuzia, a civilian Midwesterner, fought for Biafra, as did Lt. Col. Morah, who became the paymaster in Biafra. How could Biafra have won such a war? As soon as the firing was too heavy to bear, they thought of mama and papa back in the peaceful Midwest, then they ran away. Most were losers. Let us, for once, imagine that Biafra became a reality. What part of Biafra would they have belonged to. What would have happened to their children in future?

These senior officers, like most leaders in Nigeria never thought of the consequences of their actions, as most of them believed that they would live forever. When the federal troops re-entered Asaba (when the Midwest was recaptured), many of their kith and kin were brutally massacred in hundreds. Could this have happened if they were there? Thank God, the Lord wanted a united Nigeria, and this happened to these well-decorated senior officers of the Nigerian army - who defected to become Biafran army officers. Thank God also for people like Gowon who let all of them go free unlike what happened to Nazi officers of the world war. An estimated two million Nigerians died in the civil war including women and children, because of wrong leaders.

I could have been sacrificed at Asaba, and that would have made my mother cry. And all for what? These officers sold their birthright. They all had glittering resumes, but had no fire in their belly. They were all lily-livered, and could not fight for what they believed in, because when I called Col. Nwawo, Commander of the 4th Area Command at Benin City from Asaba and at Agbor on the telephone, during Biafra's break into the Midwest Region on the night of August 8th/9th 1967, he kept saying the same thing all over again. I said that the Biafrans crossed the bridge as contained in my *sitrep* (Situation Report) and that there were about ten or more Biafran casualties after attacking me at my house. Nwawo kept retorting, cynically, "Is that so?"

But the worst of them all was Capt. Isichei, who thought he could laugh at my God. He had since known better that my God with me was and is more than all of them put together. I will do it again anytime, anywhere. Nobody, and no matter how highly placed will laugh at the God I serve. His name is JESUS CHRIST, just in case they still dont know. I had since forgiven them though, because I had ail the opportunity to take revenge on them and their families. But vengeance is of the Lord, as the Lord had amply rewarded me in all aspects of my life.

For readers of historical account to understand the situation a little better, it was like troops advancing to capture Ibadan from Lagos but bypassed Ibadan, and got to Ilorin. Ibadan will beg for mercy. So, why worry about Asaba, Warri and Benin City when the big stuff was Lagos. I was not sure if the Biafrans had a plan for their AIM. And what was the aim anyway? Speed in the military is not running 100 metres dash, but by making haste slowly according to the plans made. It took three to four days to announce a governor for the captured Midwest. Their arrival at Benin carried no punch with it. They just got some innocent children killed. I remembered what Chief Dafe told me about

how strong their senior officers were. When we put this to test, we found what was contrary to his views.

I could not believe the way they moved and how haphazard that was. For instance, why didn't the Biafrans just drive straight to their objective, Lagos, then one or two Biafran soldiers would have been waiting at my door at Asaba. I would have woken up in the morning into the hands of some Biafran soldiers who would have captured and taken me to Enugu or wherever. In the same breath, with Biafrans announcing from Lagos radio and TV that they had closed the Lagos International Airport to all in-coming flights and that a governor was being appointed for Benin Republic, the picture would have been totally different. The governor had to be a non-Ibo speaking person for tactical and strategic reasons. That would have shown straightaway what stuff these people were made of, and what their aim was for Nigeria. This move into the Midwest and to Yoruba areas was to cost them dearly in men, materials and the war, as it further escalated the war in favour of the federal government.

Even if their arrival in Lagos was to be short-lived, a statement would have been made. Also, why was it necessary for Major Chukwuka's troops to advance to Warri? Was Warri so important when the aim had not been achieved? I could not believe what happened and what I saw. I knew that Biafra would need to do better than that to win the war. I never saw any of those weapons developed by the Biafran scientists in use to completely stop the advancing 3MCDO troops from Calabar to Port Harcourt, as mentioned by Chief Dafe, when we met at Obiaruku on the Ethiope in July and September 1967.

After the war, Chief Dafe and I met again. You can imagine what the discussions were all about.

He was given a federal government appointment. God bless General Gowon. The Biafrans lost some of their best men and materials in the Midwest, routed by federal troops in less than six weeks.

Then, of course, the capture of Enugu by 1 Division of the federal troops, made things worse for them. I was not surprised.

I went close enough to observe what Major Chukwuka's troops were loading at Warri, and how they were deployed. They were not tactically deployed. They were loading vehicles with foodstuffs. Major Chukwuka went to the same staff college as I attended in Pakistan. The training school that I later attended in 1971, he had attended in 1965. Furthermore in 1965, I was at Senior Tactics School in the same Quetta, Pakistan, where I first met him. I thought that he knew better than that. It was difficult to beat his 1965 record when I got to the staff college in 1971. How could he then have done this to himself and his family by obeying illegitimate instructions? I thought that he would have just told whoever it was that they should go to the objective instead of chasing shadows. When they might have reached Lagos, they would have loaded more food from Warri back to their Benin sector.

Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Ejoor, the governor escaped being captured and killed, and had taken refuge at, guess where he landed - Baba Bazuaye's house on Airport Road across the state house which incidentally was where my family was staying. He was then taken across to the Catholic Father Rooney's house next door. Baba Bazuaye told me that he, Ejoor, had a meeting with Lt. Col. Banjo there. The next day, my mother, my wife and three children quickly left the area for Ikilibi, Utagba-Uno. They came in my car from Benin. And there she was, an Ilorin woman with three tribal marks speaking Ukwuani with the natives and telling stories.



My mother at the Niger Bridge, Asaba. She visited me on August 5th, 1967, just three days before Biafra's entry into the Midwest Region. I was the troops commander at Asaba end of the bridge.



From left Major Chukwuka and Alabi-Isana in Pakistan, 1965

Two days later, I was shaving in front of the house at Ikilibi when some Biafrans, about seven, came by, asking me if I saw one Alabi, an army officer who was said to be there. I just said no. I was calm, and he spoke English. If he had spoken Ibo, I would have been in trouble. There was no way I could have replied appropriately though I was ready for a counter-attack. I was now getting annoyed because someone definitely had told them about me for the Biafran soldiers had mentioned me by name. I decided, stupidly, to go and attack them. This time I had only one grenade left and about 40 rounds of ammunition and my SMG. Everybody including my wife was crying that I should not go. I was tired of hiding. I drove off, my wife was still holding on to the car, she opened the car door with one leg in and one out, the door still opened and she kept crying-reminding me of my mother and children crying back home. She was pregnant with our fourth son. She insisted on coming with me. I got to Agbor after about one and a half hours drive from Ikilibi, Utagba-Uno. I was wearing the same track suit I had on from Asaba.

Captured by Biafrans

Just as we got to Agbor junction, a Biafran soldier recognised me at the road block. He was one of my footballers. He shouted, "This is the man that killed some of our people at Asaba". My wife was still crying - so I was arrested, and we drove to the Biafran commander's office. And who was he? Major Ochei. Ochei, then Captain, was my boss way back at Zaria Military School (NMS) in 1962. We were at the military school together as tactics instructors at Zaria in 1962. An incident happened which he reminded me of when I was marched to him. "You stupid man", he said, "You think you know too much; but for your mother who used to give us pounded yam and gifts, I would have killed you now. You killed many of our soldiers at Asaba and ran away". He said he would not kill me; instead I would join Biafran troops to attack Ehor. At that time Nigerian troops had blocked and blown one bridge to further delay Biafran advance to Lagos beyond Ore. When they opened fire at the ragtag federal troops, which were hurriedly put together at Ibadan and moved to Ore, most of the federal troops fled - that was what led to the Yoruba slogan - "*O le ku, Ija Ore*" (it was tough at Ore battle).

When we were together at Zaria, I had a problem with Ochei, which he reminded me about. Major Wakeman, then School Commandant, a British Officer, had given Ochei a training programme to prepare; and after 30 days, the job had still not been done. I was posted from the Congo to the military school. I reported to Major Wakeman on a Monday morning. He welcomed me and gave me my first assignment of preparing a training programme for the boys of the military school. He gave me 30 days to deliver the training programme. I was shocked. This was something that I could give him in 30 minutes. I started wondering why 30 days. Anyway, by Wednesday, which was the third day, I went to deliver the training programme to Major Wakeman. He asked "So fast?" I told him that I could have delivered it the same

day and wondered why he gave me 30 days and that I wasn't sure what the catch was, and that I was tired of torturing myself. He called Capt. Ochei and told him not to worry about the training programme anymore, that Lt. Alabi had completed and delivered it. Capt. Ochei was furious.

He came back to the office to scold me for preparing a training programme for Major Wakeman without passing it through him as my boss. I apologised and explained that Major Wakeman gave me the job and I thought it was a test for me. Capt. Ochei did not forget the incident. He repeated it when I was captured at Agbor. But I was inattentive. All that was on my mind was how to escape. I studied his map on the wall quickly, and I saw his plans were lousy. However, he was talking tough about withdrawal routes, but there was nothing to show for it.

Alabi-Isama, a Biafran officer?

In the meantime, I was ordered to command the Biafran troops deployed as reinforcement to Ehor to counter-attack the federal troops commanded by Lt. Cols. Akinrinade and Murtala Mohammed. It was on 22nd day of August 1967. He introduced me to the officers and men. He told them about the Asaba incident and that I was the commander.

Everybody applauded and he told them that I was going to lead them to Ehor. The troops were pleased. Radio had already announced that I had been captured and that I had voluntarily joined Biafran forces advancing to Ehor. Then I asked Major Ochei if I could have at least a day's rest, as I had been fighting alone in the past week. I made him comfortable and dragged the conversation further. I asked why they planned to kill me at Asaba instead of taking me into confidence, which would have saved some lives. At that point he told me how it was planned and that they were not sure about me and how I would have reacted if they told me about Biafra's plan to invade Benin and Lagos.

Then we started talking tactics and strategy. He knew me well for both of us had worked together before as tactics instructors. He agreed that they had made a mistake by attacking me at Asaba, and that they lost over six hours as a result. Their plan was to arrive at Benin at midnight and Lagos at between 5-6.00a.m. during the rush hour. He further told me that he was searching for Ogbemudia, who had joined the Nigerian troops, and many of the non-Ibo speaking officers. He also mentioned that the signal I sent from Asaba alerted everybody and rather than getting organised to fight, they all ran away. He also told me that Captain Tuoyo, the guard commander at the government state house led the only soldiers that fired any shots at all. We spoke for more than an hour. I continued to drag the discussion longer and then I asked him to brief me on what next. He told me that but for the alert signal from Asaba which I sent, they would have caught the Lagos and Ibadan troops napping but that the Biafran troops would then reorganise at Benin in view of the new challenges and head on for Lagos the next day after clearing Ehor town of federal troops. But if Ehor was difficult, he showed me on the map how he would withdraw and where to.

Since I asked for a day to rest, he said that he would approve it, but that I would address the vigilantes at a hall arranged somewhere at 4.00p.m. that day 22nd August 1967 and that the attack on Ehor would be delayed another 24 hours for me to be ready. The attack was to be at 6.00a.m. I was given a Mercedes Benz as staff car with a driver, orderly and a Land Rover jeep with seven men as escort. I was given a room to rest for the night. Fair enough. I was driven to the house. Then they gave me an assignment; I was to address the Biafran civil defence team just formed at Benin. What was I to say? Earlier, I had been told "just talk to them, to be happy to serve the new Republic of Benin and to report any federal troops or spies entering Benin

Kingdom.” Well if that was all, I thought, then it was fair enough. This event was for 4.00p.m. I returned to my wife in the car and told her all that had happened. We drove to the DO’s (District Officer) office who knew me well. He wished me well. He was not sure what to say, but looking at his eyes, I knew he was thinking that I was an idiot fraternising with Biafran troops. I told him not to worry, that everything would be okay. I went to the civil defence people. Mr. Okonofua, the Sapele police chief was there and was happy to see me alive again

Note from Major Ndiomu

As Mr. Okonofua was talking with me, he asked, “Are you sure you want to be with these people?” Then came a lady I knew then as Major Charles Ndiomu’s friend when we were at Benin 4th Area Command with a note for me. I asked her, “Where is my brother?” She gave me the note to read.

“Alabi, now that you are out, I trust you, I am at Forcados, can I come out?” I replied on the same note “I am out and alive, you may not be. Stay where you are; when the federal troops arrive, I will contact you”. I let Mr. Okonofua read the note.

He looked at me surprisingly and I said, “Akinrinade is coming, he knows where to find me, and he is already at Ehor advancing to Benin”.

Akinrinade knew where to find me or where to look for me in Benin. When we were young officers, we had some friends at Mission Road in Benin, and that had always been our rendezvous. I was sure that he would look for me there. I had already left a message with details of the Biafran plans as discussed with Ochei and let him know that I was making other efforts to reach him. Akinrinade thus knew that I was trying to escape.

Chapter Four

ESCAPE FROM BIAFRAN CAPTORS

At about 7.00p.m., on 22nd August, 1967, the escort and driver took me to my guest house. I had planned my escape. I told all of them to return at 9.00p.m. They did. Meanwhile, I had slept a little. At 9.00p.m., I told them to come back at 12 midnight - they did. Then I told them to come back again at 3.00a.m. I commended them that they were good and disciplined soldiers, the type that I would like to go to battle with, as they were punctual at anytime I gave them time for action. They came back at exactly 3.00a.m. as I had ordered them. I followed them this time to see troops' preparation and further addressed them on the task ahead as officers would to their men preparing for battle. I was escorted back to my guest house. I then told the escorts to go and get some rest but to come back at 5.45a.m. I made sure that they saw me getting ready and wearing the Biafran uniform issued to me by Ochei.

The escorts left and I also told the driver and orderly to go now and get some rest and that we had a long and tough day ahead of us. Some ten minutes after they left, I drove out in the Mercedes Benz and headed first on Lagos road and mentioned my name many times and made some noise. The idea was for the road blocks to say that they saw me pass on Benin-Ore road, heading for Lagos. Then I turned back to Ikilibi Utagba-Uno. At about 5.00a.m., I was home with my family. My second son Gbolahan was very sick and there were no medicines around. I took him, and picked up Mr. Martins Nwoseh again, and headed back for Benin through Eku. My soccer trips across the state made me

familiar with these roads and to have many friends located across the state. Mr. Martins Nwoseh had to return to his work at G. Cappa construction office in Benin where his company had given him indefinite leave of absence to enable him help me out. I arrived in Benin at about 6.30-7.00a.m. on August 23rd 1967.

I reported to Baba Bazuaye at Benin Airport Road and stayed home. I told him all the stories. He later, in turn, told me about Lt. Col. Ejoor, the governor. By the night of 19th September, federal troops arrived Benin City. Akinrinade knew where to find me. We met at Mission Road and it was a great re-union.

Federal troops advance

I took a battalion from Akinrinade's brigade of federal troops. We started advancing towards Agbor. It was at this point that Col. Murtala Mohammed met me and expressed happiness that I alerted Lagos from Asaba on the night of August 8th 1967. But when he later heard that I had joined the Biafran Army, he was looking forward to killing me. I then gave him a detailed account about all that transpired. He was pleased with my explanations. I then quickly travelled to Kwale to collect the letter of support for the Federal troops signed by the chiefs of Aboh province.

Head of State (Gowon)'s call to Lagos

On September 25th, 1967, I was recalled to Benin and told that Gowon had sent a plane to bring me to Lagos. I was so happy and thought that medals were waiting for me and that I was going to be decorated like a Christmas tree with medals of gallantry, for alerting federal troops on the night of August 8th 1967 and all that. The flight was for 6.00p.m. and the time was 11.00a.m. While waiting for the flight, I went to Baba Bazuaye and told him that I thought I was going to be decorated by the Head of State, General Gowon

in Lagos because of all these events - the fights at Asaba and Agbor, all my efforts at delaying the Biafran troops from arriving Benin City at 12 midnight and Lagos at 6.00a.m. as they planned and my escape from Biafran troops after I was captured. I told him that Gowon sent a plane to bring me to Lagos. I then spent about an hour at Baba Bazuaye's house ironing my uniform. Baba Bazuaye had told stories about me to Oba Akenzua. The Oba requested Baba Bazuaye to bring me whenever I showed up again. When this happened, he took me to the Oba who called all the chiefs available and thanked me for all my efforts for not allowing Biafran troops to drive to Benin at midnight and to Lagos by morning with all my guerrilla attacks en route Asaba to Benin.

The Oba added, "Despite all your efforts, many of our people were able to run away, and those who could not, like Chief Akpata and Police Commissioner Adeola, were arrested and taken to Enugu. You see, if you had not stopped or delayed the Biafrans and they had arrived Benin by midnight, the situation would have been more disastrous for us".

Oba Akenzua's gift for gallantry

Oba Akenzua then gave me a signed document through Baba Bazuaye for a piece of land in Benin. It was a plot of land measuring 100 x 100 yards. Baba, Chief Okungbowa did the same on Sapele Road at a place called Okwa 2 - this was 1,000ft x 1,000ft, he also signed it. They gave me the papers through Baba Bazuaye. I later arrived in Lagos at about 8.00p.m. that night, still holding the letter of support of the federal government by chiefs of Aboh province and was met at the airport and driven to Dodan Barracks. When I got to see General Gowon, the way and manner in which I hit my feet coming to attention was so hard that I felt the pains right to my spine. However, the story I heard from Gowon was far different from my expectations.

Gowon said, “Well, take him away, I am at a meeting with President Eyadema of Togo”.

I turned around and hit my right foot on the floor again, parading and saluting Gowon. I have not really recovered from the pain on my spine till today.

Kirikiri experience

After the audience with Gowon, I went back into the vehicle and we drove away. I dozed off and had no idea where we were going until we stopped. I woke up in absolute shock to find myself at Kirikiri Maximum Security Prisons. For a moment, I was disoriented, and then I screamed, grabbed the prison superintendent’s jacket and tore his uniform. His name was Mr. Ifijeh. He was much older than I. As I jumped on him and rough-handled the innocent fellow, I was also crying.

“How can this happen to me?” I screamed.

Other prison officials came to the aid of Mr. Ifijeh and overpowered me. Mr. Ifijeh raised his baton to hit me, but stopped short of doing that and said,

“People like you don’t know God. There is war out there, people are dying and you are here kept by God in a maximum security place - you are complaining and fighting.”

I continued screaming and asked Ifijeh what type of God he thought I served who did not keep me at the Federal Palace Hotel (that was one of the best hotels in Lagos at the time) to drink and dance?

“You think my God will keep me at Kirikiri?” I spat the question at them.

They just threw me into one of the cells and banged the door. For the next two days I refused to eat. I was protesting my detention at Kirikiri with hunger strike. Prison officials

pleaded with me to eat but I refused. But by the third day, I was so hungry that I gave up. A warder then came by my cell and asked if I was ready to eat. I said yes.

“What do you want?”

“Pounded yam.”

“What soup?”

“Egusi soup with meat or fish.”

They came back with all these. I could not believe what I saw. I ate so quickly that I was belching almost every second. Later, the officials came back again.

“Do you want a drink?”

“Yes”

“What?”

“Water or beer.”

They brought these. Then at night, I ordered for rice and fried plantain. They brought these again. I was treated like a special person. Mr. Ifijeh, the prison superintendent also came by smiling but I did not see what was funny. I told him how I had fought without any assistance from the night of August 8th until date and so on. Then, he sat down and spoke admonishingly to me, making me read several verses of his Bible - *Hebrew 10 vs. 35 and 36 and Ps 34 vs. 37*. Finally, he left me still weeping. I must have done something wrong for God to abandon me at this time that I needed Him most, I thought.

By the third day, I was allowed into the prison compound to walk around and exercise. I met some of the prisoners including Chief Emmanuel Kotoye, a director of the former Societe-Generale Bank and one hard core prisoner who had been there for eight years, called Ewele. I guessed he had listened to some of my conversations with the prison

officials, and noticed how well I was treated. Ewele advised me to ask for cigarettes.

“But I don’t smoke,” I said.

“Well, get it and give us,” he replied.

When the official came, I asked for beer, whisky and cigarettes. He asked what type.

“Bicycle cigarettes,” I replied, thinking it was the best. All these were brought to me. I passed them on to Ewele. Then he advised me to ask for Benson & Hedges cigarettes the next time. I did and they gave me. Every time I was released to walk around, all the prisoners hailed me. I resigned myself to my fate. I could not change the situation and I was now their new leader. I was not ready to plan another escape. It was not worth it anymore. I had suffered enough. I took it as good holiday with room service, except for the floor I slept on.

Police interrogation

After a week, I was taken out to the yard to exercise again. I played soccer and ran around. I did not bother to plan any escape. Aside my inability to contact my mother and family, I was relatively comfortable. But there was no bed. I slept on the hard floor. My aching spine after that parade for Gowon had healed a little and I felt better. I had a good sleep. I never had time to dream and nobody bothered to wake me up. Whenever I was awake, prison officials came only to ask what I would eat. The answer was always the same — pounded yam, beer, cigarettes and water. Then one Mr. Bakare from Police CID (Central Investigation Department) came to interrogate me. I answered all his questions and told him all the stories from Kaduna, to Benin, to Asaba, to Agbor and how I was captured by Biafran Army at Agbor, the escape from my captors, and the rest, and that I was expecting a medal. Instead, I was sent to Kirikiri. Mr. Bakare

came back one more time and asked why I changed my name from Major Abdul Rahman Alabi to Godwin Alabi-Isama at such a time of the war. I told him my life story all over again and how my mother insisted on my saving the lives of people from Kwale area, through identification with Christian rather than Muslim (Hausa) name detested in that area and at that time.



Mr Bakare of the Police CID and wife, in patterned dresses. Alabi-Isama and wife are in white.

“But since I came here, how many people knew what has happened to me and who cared anyway?” I asked my interrogator in annoyance. He left on the second day, which was also my fifteenth day at Kirikiri Prisons; it was an embarrassing experience.



Mr Bakare and I finally met again at Maiduguri for a Chad operation.



Mr Bakare (with pipe) and Col. Alabi-Isama after the war on a Chad operation.

Asaba-River Niger crossing and 2 Division

My mother was looking for me, Akinrinade was looking for me and so was my sister. The federal troops that I was leading before I was recalled near Abudu on Agbor road drowned and died at Asaba River Niger trying to cross into

Onitsha. Their tactics of a frontal attack on the enemy at the opposite end of the river was one of the blunders of the Nigerian Army during the civil war. Akinrinade had protested against the plan to cross the river 'frontally at Asaba and he fell out with his commander, Col. Murtala Mohammed. The rest, today, is history. As if that was not enough, 2 Division under Col. Mohammed's command made further attempts to capture Onitsha frontally. Finally, they went through Agenebode/Idah, via the left flank.

But federal troops then lined up in a convoy as if on a bush training exercise. The convoy was ambushed at Abagana, where many more troops were killed and all their vehicles, supplies of food and medicines burnt and destroyed. It was a disaster for which as at the time of writing this book, no official lists of the dead and wounded had been released. As a matter of fact, there was no official enquiry as to what happened till today. Who cared? It was not until March 21, 1968 that 7 Brigade, formerly under the command of Lt.Col. S.F. Daramola, came under Captain Shehu Yar'Adua to take Onitsha, forcing Biafran troops under Col. Nwawo into the Nnewi enclave. From then on, it was mostly quiet on 2 Division front even until the war ended. They treaded softly thereafter. I would have thought that instead of destroying all those equipment, vehicles and supplies, they could have replaced some of Biafra's losses during their entry into the Midwest, but it was not to be.

The news of the first Onitsha river-crossing disaster went round and, of course, Gowon was told. He was said to have asked, "All the troops?" "Yes," he got for answer.

"Alabi-Isama, Akinrinade and all?" He further inquired.

He was then reminded that "the last time you ordered Alabi to be taken away, he was taken to Kirikiri Prisons and locked up and Akinrinade was looking for him, so both officers were not affected."

Gowon was said to have ordered that I should be released immediately and posted to Adekunle in the Calabar front. Akinrinade was posted to Bonny Island; both units were part of 3MCDO Division of the Nigerian Army in the Atlantic theatre of the war.

Significance of Kirikiri

Here then is the story for which I have to praise the Lord. Some elements of federal troops of 4th Battalion that had been looking for me in Kaduna after the surviving NMTC ibos were evacuated, were still looking for me, the Biafrans also, were looking for me after my escape from Agbor and Ehor attacks. The only way for God to save me from both was to take me away. Though Kirikiri Prisons might not have been the way to go, Mr. Ifijeh's story about God keeping me there was correct after all. Once again in my life, although I did not have it smooth sailing, I had a safe landing. I probably would have died either from Biafran fire, or federal troop's fire or got drowned in the River Niger at Asaba. Mr. Ifijeh, the prison superintendent then reminded me of what he said 15 days earlier that God came to hide me at Kirikiri prisons. I insisted that I had to see Gowon to know why he did that to me. Mr. Ifijeh once again said: "Just thank God, and go your way. Do you want to fight God?" When I heard that, my mind relaxed and I just walked out quietly.

Prison experience

The fifteen days I spent in Kirikiri seemed much shorter because of certain events. One which I will not want to forget was my first Sunday in the prison, when a preacher came to preach to all the prisoners, saying "God has a reason for your being here."

Ewele shouted, "Nonsense! I did not do anything; those who did are drinking tea somewhere". However, Ewele was not alone in that thinking. I probably did not shout as much

as Ewele, but I expressed my disagreement with the pastor fairly audibly thus:

I saved the lives of my men
I saved the lives of my people
I saved the honour of my nation
Tell me what also the will of God is!

The preacher calmed us down and continued. He gave us an example of an earthquake somewhere in the Caribbean that killed everybody except the wrongly accused prisoner on death row who was in fact to be hanged that very day. Everybody else including the governor of that island died except this prisoner. To me, all these were nonsense until the story of federal troops river crossing disaster at Asaba came in. I shouted, "Those were some of my troops! I would have been there."

Ifijeh came back and talked to me some more. Then the pastor prayed for us, and told me about *Hebrew 10 vs. 35-36* again. It was then that I wept, remembering that I could have been there too, drowned in the Niger River, had I not been at Kirikiri prison.

My beloved mother and sister at the prison's gate

Just as I walked out of Kirikiri Prisons gate, here were my mother and sister. For fifteen days, they had not heard from me. The story about troops drowning at Asaba was the last they heard from me. They both searched everywhere until they got to Kirikiri Prisons after a tip-off from Gowon's office at Dodan Barracks. Baba Bazuaye at Benin told them that the last he heard from me was that I was going to be decorated by Gowon in Lagos, and that he had just taken me to Oba Akenzua of Benin who thanked me for not letting Biafran troops arrive at Benin at 12 midnight as planned.

When they saw me, they hugged me and asked if Mr. Ifijeh could keep me a little longer at Kirikiri prisons as the war was raging and hot on all sectors.

Mr. Ifijeh told them, "The Lord is with this man - just go and the Lord will direct his ways."

Then Mr. Ifijeh said God had never promised anybody a smooth sailing but a safe landing.

"Your son is safe, just praise the Lord. Go, kill a ram for sacrifice."

Then he turned to me and said, "Strange destiny brought you here, young man - have the sense to stay alive". But I am sure Mr. Ifijeh noticed my displeasure at his remark, for he almost immediately warned me of my hardheartedness. As far as I was concerned, the pastor was talking nonsense until the Asaba story came in. When Ifijeh said, let us pray, I knelt down humbly with eyes closed, this time with arms widely spread to their limit and I said, "Amen" many times before he ever said a word. All the other prisoners joined me in the prayer session. I said many more "Amens" as he prayed. Mr. Ifijeh and I shook hands, and hugged some of the other prisoners and Ewele. The prison officials escorted me out.

There was my mother and sister waiting to receive me at the prison's gate. I was already a friend of the prisoners as they waved and all shouted, "good luck, Major, good luck, Major," many times. So, I left my "Kirikiri holiday resort," for war front again.

Two days later, on Friday October 20th 1967, I was at the Calabar front as Chief of Staff to Col. Benjamin Adekunle's 3 Marine Commando Division in the Atlantic theatre of the civil war.



General Daramola (second right)

Chapter Five

OPERATION TIGER CLAW

The capture of Bonny Island on the Atlantic coast on the night of 26th/27th July 1967 by troops commanded by Col. Benjamin Adekunle, was a massive shock to the Biafran troops. Before the enemy recovered from that shock, again on October 17th, 1967, Calabar was captured by 3MCDO troops led again by Col. Adekunle, supported by naval bombardment and infantry units. Heavy weapons were difficult to land on the Henshaw Town beach at Calabar and so were the constraints of distance for the Nigerian Air Force. It was a very daring amphibious landing and attack, in the middle of nowhere and with their backs to the sea. The 3MCDO had travelled the near a thousand kilometres of Atlantic coast from Lagos to Calabar, unopposed, and with some more troops from Bonny Island for this military operation called *Operation Tiger Claw*. Col. Benjamin Adekunle was a very brilliant and fearless soldier.

Among the officers who landed with him were Lt. Col. Ochefu, the most senior of his officers, and Major Ted Hamman who later died at Owerri. Lt. Col. Ochefu was wounded and taken back to Lagos. He did not return to 3MCDO again until the end of the war. The seaborne landing had succeeded. Adekunle led from the front, his troops saw him by their side. He landed at the Henshaw Town beach with them and led the attack to expand the beachhead up to Hope Waddell High School and the cement factory. The personal example he set as the commander worked wonders. The troops had to fight with utter intensity as there was no withdrawal route. What bullets were waiting for them in front from the Biafrans was a joke compared with what the consequences would be if they had to retreat.



Retreat to where? Retreat was not an option. Adekunle made them understand the danger of their situation. The men of 3MCDO fought ruthlessly. As the beachhead was being expanded and 3MCDO troops inched forward, the Biafran counter-attack came in waves. We had casualties and lost ground. The most important ground held was the Calabar airport. We needed the airport for the air force to support the forward exploitation of the beachhead, our reinforcement, supplies of food, ammunition and medicine. The alternative was by ship, which would take about 30 days of turnaround voyage. With our back to the sea, retreating was death itself, so it was better to fight and win. As more casualties came in from the war front at Hope Wadell High School and from Mary Slessor fronts, the DC3 flights that brought reinforcements from Lagos returned with casualties. The ships, called *Bode Thomas* and *Qua River*, brought more supplies and reinforcements and took back casualties to Lagos. We suddenly realised that with the flights and ships taking casualties back, we would soon have the problems of deserters as well. We were losing ground to the enemy until we held a meeting with the unit commanders - Adekunle, Alabi-Isama, Ahmadu Aliyu, Abubakar, Tuoyo, Buba Yaro and Ted Hamman on the new plan of advance and how to move forward and regain the initiative from the enemy. We concentrated on expanding the beachhead, and our advance and attack were still of the frontal nature. Envelopment and any other tactics were difficult due to the terrain. The entire Uwet area was full of deep valleys and high hills to the left and right.

It was at this juncture (during one of our commanders' conferences) that I recounted the story of a Spanish conquistador named Hernando Cortes (1485-1547). This man left Cuba with just 500 men, 11 ships, 13 horses and a

small number of cannons to attack Mexico, in the kingdom of the Aztecs, in search of gold. Cortes knew it was a suicidal mission, but because he needed the gold, he was ready to fight for it. As soon as his men realised the enormity of the task ahead of them, that only 500 of them were up against thousands of Aztecs, they mutinied. Cortes realised that he had no chance against the Aztecs if his men revolted against him. He, therefore, forged an alliance with some locals who were also against the Aztecs. In order to banish any idea of retreat from his men's minds, he scuttled all the 11 ships that brought them from Cuba into Mexico.

Why did he do that? He told his men that it was either that they would fight and win and get the gold, or be killed by the Aztecs, and that mutiny against him would be counterproductive. Their chances of survival was in fighting, not in mutiny; and if there was the possibility of getting gold which they came for, it was also by fighting, and fighting very hard.

Cortes and his 500 men and the natives that were opposed to the Aztec's fought gallantly and prevailed. Then I suggested to our commander, Adekunle, and all the other officers at the meeting that we should adopt the Cortes strategy; that we should withdraw the naval ships, recruit locals and get essential services running. Events on ground were to our advantage.

Radio Biafra was blasting out that they had defeated the Nigerian troops they described as "vandals," and had pushed them into the sea. But the locals (the Calabar people) were very supportive indeed. They knew that stories from Radio Biafra were propaganda; lies. We soon realised that the Biafrans had alienated the natives and labelled them saboteurs for allowing Nigerian troops to land at Calabar. The Biafrans knew that it was as a result of their

defensive errors and incompetence, rather than the collusions of the natives, that caused their defeat, but they had to blame somebody for it. Then, we went to look for the officials of the Electricity Corporation and Radio Nigeria in Calabar, and we were only able to find one Mr. Alloysious Ekanem of Calabar Radio Nigeria. The rest had gone with the Biafrans as refugees. Mr. Alloysious Ekanem then started to broadcast our announcement on the radio, that all should remain calm at home. We didn't want to have refugees. The fight was for ONE Nigeria, and that all able-bodied and interested individuals would be welcome to join the Nigerian Army. We wasted no time in re-establishing law and order. The military police started arranging for civil defence. People responded to our call in their hundreds. Then Adekunle ordered that all officers should go and address their men as discussed on the Cortes strategy.

The bullets we would face from the Biafrans would be a joke compared to getting drowned in the Atlantic Ocean behind us. The naval ships withdrew into mid-sea, on orders from Adekunle, because as long as the ships were visible from shore, the men might start thinking of withdrawing to the ships, or that the wounded would be evacuated. The Calabar airport was quickly cleared of the rebels to allow for reinforcements, ammunition and supplies from Lagos. The logistic coordination was perfect. I guess that did it. From then on, the officers and men of 3MCDO fought with more zeal and determination. Morale was high, and the natives assisted in looking after the rear by organising civil defence under one Mr. Archibong, Dr. Ekanem, and Mrs. Henshaw, the wife of Dr. Henshaw. Hospitals opened, with doctors and nurses ready to work. A room in Mrs Henshaw's house was used as my war room; she was very helpful indeed.

The 3MCDO had surprised the Biafrans by the sea landing. They were caught on the hop. The Biafrans least expected

anything like it. I guess they never thought that anybody in the Nigerian Army was capable of such a feat. They were wrong. The Biafrans who boasted that no army in all of Black Africa could defeat them never took care of their coastline. That, in itself, was not a brilliant military appreciation of their situation by their High Command (if there was anything like that). They also did not integrate the non-Ibo natives of Calabar into the so-called Biafra. They alienated the natives and we quickly cashed in on that.

Just three days into the landing at Calabar by the troops of 3MCDO, on Friday, 20th October 1967, I was transferred to join Adekunle's 3MCDO, and was appointed Chief of Staff. I landed on the same day with Major Sunny Tuoyo. We joined in the attack into Akim Quo on the way to Calabar airport. We set up our defences just about five kilometres north of the town, and waited for the "enemy's" counter-attack. The counter-attack was beaten back, and Adekunle was pleased with that, and liked what we did. By the fourth day, we had captured places like Big Quo, the airport, Akim Quo, Hope Waddell Institute, Wappi High School, St. Patrick and Mary Slessor and then we headed for Odukpani. We were not sure of the next counter-attack as the first one was like a strong patrol wanting to locate our forward defences. In the meantime, more reinforcements arrived with officers as well.

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With our backs to the sea while our chests faced Biafran bullets, we continued to expand the beachhead with the arrival of some two-inch mortars and 81 mm mortars, while still waiting for more heavy weapons and the air force jet fighters. Fighting was road bound due to the terrain.

We dug-in, while waiting for their counter-attack. As more reinforcements of officers and men came from Lagos, we

then organised all units into proper companies, battalions, and brigades. Each company had 150 infantry; battalions had 500 infantry, while the brigades had 2,000 infantry men. Supporting arms and services were being called forward, and as soon as the airport was cleared of the enemy, we called in the air force. Within a few hours, the air force bombs arrived in a DC3 aircraft, and shortly thereafter, in less than an hour, bombing of enemy locations started. You can imagine what that meant to the troops. The enemy withdrew fast and we were in hot pursuit immediately. By Friday October 27th 1967, we had captured Odukpani junction, Creek Town, up to Adiabo and Akpap. We had broken the enemy's will to fight, and their resistance. The beachhead was now about 40 kilometres deep, with our feet firmly on the ground. The successful establishment of our feet on ground was one of the main points why attacking Port Harcourt (PH) later from Bonny Island was ruled out.

At this stage, we dug-in, and waited for the counter-attack which never came until after about two weeks. That gave us the time to reorganise and prepare for another push. By Christmas of 1967, we were already at Iwuru, and Ikot-Okpora waterside facing Arochukwu. The new officers sent to us were seasoned men like Lt. Cols. Ayo Ariyo, Eromobor, Obeya, and Shande. Other officers also arrived which included Majors Utuk, Innih, Captains Okwarobo of Artillery Unit, Sedenu, Arinye, and Richard of Military Police.

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We were completely beefed up, ready for battle, while recruiting of the locals also continued at Calabar Town with

Captain Kunle Elegbede as training instructor. Major Isaac Boro was also responsible for training the men in swimming, canoeing, paddling, and the use of outboard engines for our dugout canoes. His outfit was called, 'The Sea School'. This was designed to make us cope with the terrain, and all the expected obstacles in our area of operation. Some of the training included how to rescue a drowning soldier, victims of snake bites and how to apply first aid in general, considering the fact that the new reinforcements arriving from Lagos were green.

They were quickly trained for a few more weeks before they were sent to the war front. Their 'baptism of fire' were the long range patrols we organised for them, which were led by seasoned officers like Capts. Kunle Elegbede, S.S. Tomoye, Lt. Cols. Obeya, Abubakar, Ayo Ariyo, while Sunny Tuoyo commanded the new brigade at Odukpani. To avoid surprise attacks from the beaches, Ted Hamman, Eromobor, and Aliyu were positioned to defend the beaches including the Elder Dempster coastal areas up to Atimbo. It was after Odukpani had been captured that Col. Adekunle allowed the Nigerian naval ships to return to the Calabar port from the sea. The consolidation and reorganisation were very swift indeed. However, we still lacked heavy weapons, including artillery guns, and armoured vehicles. We had only six pieces of two-inch mortars and 81 mm mortars per the new brigades, and the bombs for them were scanty. We kept the training going steadily, and then we continued with long-range patrols, to dominate 'no-man's-land' between us and the enemy. Adekunle was on the operational radio with the Army HQ in Lagos for over 12 hours daily, demanding for one thing or the other. We had Christmas and New Year parties at Calabar. Some families came from Lagos. My mother also came for the Christmas party.

After the drinking and dancing at Christmas, we intensified training and long-range patrols. The natives at Calabar were very cooperative without which our operations would have been difficult. Not many of them had been recruited into the Biafran army as we had envisaged. As a matter of fact, we had thought that everyone would have been armed to the teeth since most of them also lost relatives and property during the unrest in the northern part of the country in July/August 1966.

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The Biafran propaganda had told them that the Nigerian troops were Hausas and Muslims that had killed their kith and kin during the unrest in the North. The people of Calabar found out on their own that Biafran propaganda was not accurate and they gave us all the support they could muster.

Each family was involved one way or the other, as they helped in off-loading our supplies from the ships. As we did not have enough troops for fighting, we needed extra hands to do some of the menial but important jobs. The natives came to our rescue.

They did all these with smiles and at no cost to the army. They were guides, vigilantes, guards, interpreters, nurses and doctors. The hospitals and all other essential services then became operational. Water, radio for news, markets and schools, (especially the girls' schools), resumed operations. The children were prepared for the 1967 high school examinations. Those who had passed and were to proceed to the university but were caught up in the blockade, were allowed to go to their various universities.

One of such girls was Margaret Eyo, who later became Nigeria's ambassador to Switzerland, and the likes of Cecilia Ekpeyong who later became Deputy Governor of Cross River State. Although the markets were opened, it was trade by barter due to difficulties with the currency situation in the area. Electricity was also difficult.

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By the end of January 1968, we were completely battle ready but counterattacks never came. We continued our usual aggressive patrolling to dominate 'no-man's-land' between Odukpani and Itu, with the Cross River to guard our left flank. It was on one of these occasions of patrolling deep into enemy territory that we decided to get to Affia Isong on the near side of the river opposite Itu.

We were ten on the patrol comprising, Capt. Buba Yaro, Lt. Musa Wamba, and seven other ranks and myself. I guess we went too far and ran into enemy fire. We all ran to our pre-determined rendezvous at Oku-Iboku, where, on our way, we had left some ammunition. It was a run for dear life, everybody to himself and God for us all as planned. We were totally exhausted. It was here that I told my orderly, Private Effiong, that I wished that we had a camera to take our pictures to show people at home how hard we were working and how tired we were. Effiong said he had a camera but didn't have films. "Do you?" I asked and he said, "Yes". When we finally got back to base in Calabar, he brought out his camera, and told me the type of films we needed. He wrote it on a piece of paper which I sent to my mother in Lagos so that she could buy the films from Kingsway stores

on the Marina. My mother just went there and bought for me Kodak films of that specification, and from that point on we began a detailed pictorial record of the battle front. Today, I have these pictures of the 3MCDO war efforts in the Atlantic theatre. This story would have otherwise been difficult.

Loss of Captain Buba Yaro

On patrol, we had no operational radio, and no vehicles. On one occasion, Capt. Buba Yaro was shot in the right side of his chest. We carried him on a fireman's lift out of the firing area, and headed for Akpap. Thereafter, we cut some trees into two to make a stretcher with palm leaves.

Unfortunately, he lost a lot of blood and died just 30 minutes before we got back to base at Calabar. Adekunle, our commander, loved this man. He was very efficient and good at map reading. We lost a gem.

When Adekunle heard of the death of Capt. Buba Yaro, he wept bitterly, and asked how it happened. All those on the patrol were there when I narrated the story. Our problem was lack of vehicles.

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There and then, Adekunle went to the airport and flew to Lagos. Adekunle requested and got everything he asked for, and what he did not get, he commandeered. Aircraft landed almost every hour loaded with one supply or the other. All stores were filled up, and when we had no more places to store things, he released all prisoners of war (POW) from Calabar prisons, and the buildings were used as stores. All the POWs were told it was ONE Nigeria. They were either free to go home, or join the 3MCDO. However, before this event the debate had been on, about what to do with the prisoners of war. *Firstly*, we did not have enough food to give

them, and *secondly*, we were short of troops for the war front, let alone have some for POW guard duties. Surprisingly, when the POWs were given the options to either go home or join the 3MCDO, most of them opted to join the 3MCDO.

They were all sent to Isaac Boro at the sea school. For about two weeks, we all slept with one eye open. These people finally proved themselves at work and at the war front. They went on patrols and came back with facts and figures. They captured suspects for interrogation from their patrols. They were good guides, and performed creditably well. They caught some Biafran infiltrators, and identified them. Their information about enemy positions was very accurate, and they led us there. So, the stores were filled to the brim, including assorted drinks even up to and including 'housewives' (needles and threads). We had supplies to last us for at least six months in food, ammunition and medicines.

Adekunle arrived Calabar very tired. As a matter of fact, it was only in the war front that he always got some rest. The death of Capt. Buba Yaro changed the entire outlook of 3MCDO, as almost everyone had new uniforms and boots. Adekunle loved debates on military tactics and strategy. This made him very different from most commanders I ever worked with. At every stage, he would call me for a debate on events for the week, where to capture, why, and when. He would tell me to come up with a plan. At times, he would have prepared thoroughly for such debates and invite the brigade commanders.

Before the attack to capture Odukpani for instance, he told me to see him in four days' time to debate the capture of the town. I was ready with maps and all. He brought all the maps from Lagos in wraps of 50 bundles each. We had

enough for every officer. After the debate on that day, he then said, "Ok, I want the place captured as had been discussed." I told him that we had already done that. Then he said, "Let us go there," and we did. He was very pleased and we became friendlier. In fact, we were then like brothers. I started calling him, "*Egbon mi*" (my elder brother). Everything went well. He was riding high. Anything he asked for from the Army HQ in Lagos, he got with no questions asked. The civilians who went to Lagos from Calabar told stories of his efforts at arranging schools for children, hospitals for the sick, the markets, for traders, places of worship for christian, and the general security of the area. He was loved by everybody.

Adekunle returned after two weeks from one of his trips to Lagos and told us on Tuesday February 20th, 1968 that we should select where next we would like to capture, and that we should all come up with suggestions the next day. Well, I wanted us to link up with 1 Division at Enugu with a view to moving our supplies and casualties by road as easily as they did. 3MCDO was just locked in, with our backs to the sea and with the Biafrans in front of us. Casualty evacuation was difficult. 3MCDO did not have heavy weapons and armoured vehicles because we did not have the ship to carry more than one at a time and they were of no use in the type of terrain in which we were operating anyway. We were operating in the mangrove forest. All these weapons and armoured vehicles were with the 1st and 2nd Divisions based in Enugu and Benin respectively. 3MCDO were just foot soldiers. So Adekunle agreed, and I came up with the plan to link up with 1 Division at Enugu through Ugep, Obubra, Afikpo, and Abakaliki to Enugu. I needed three brigades of 6,000 troops to achieve that in three months, from February 2nd, 1968 to May 29th, 1968.

I got the three specially selected brigades commanded by Major Aliyu, Major Sunny Tuoyo, and Captain Utuk. The advance started in earnest from our rendezvous at Ikot-Okpora. There were no roads from Iwuru to Adim. With the Cross River to our left, we built the roads, and culverts and advanced to Adim. This took seven days. The roads from Adim to Ugep, Ediba, and Itigidi through Nkpani to Obubra were fine as we did not have to build the roads and culverts there, and the vegetation was not as thick as from Calabar to Ikot-Okpora. By building new roads and culverts across the streams on our route, we cut off the enemy troops at Oban, Ehang, Ikom and Ogoja areas to the right, where they dug in and defended in depth. We had two battalions at Mbebu defending the route to Calabar and harassing Oban by daily patrols and shelling in order to divert their attention from our 3MCDO infiltrating troops to their right.

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We learnt a lot during this advance about the terrain and its challenges, particularly logistic support and it was also a very good baptism of fire for our green recruits. They saw victory and they loved it. The Biafrans were expecting us to attack from the right flank, through the only available road from Calabar through Oban, Ehang and Ikom into Obubra. However, after studying the map, and reports from our long-range patrols, our challenges were the deep Uwet valleys, high Oban hills, and the thick mangrove forests with many rivers without culverts, or bridges. Instead, we cut through the jungle where the Biafran troops thought was impassable, infiltrated and advanced from Calabar to Odukpani, through to Iwuru, Okurika, Adim, Ugep, Ediba, Itigidi to Obubra. By Sunday March 10th 1968, Col. Adekunle called us back just as we were entering Afikpo through Itigidi. I had moved my headquarters across the river to Uwana, which was Chief Akanu Ibiam's home town.

Akanu Ibiam was the former civilian governor of the then Eastern Nigeria before it was declared as Republic of Biafra.

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The famous lunch of human steak

I was just praising the supply and transport company (S&T) for the way hot meals got to us quickly at Ugep before advancing to Itigidi waterside. All the troops had had lunch and mine was ready also. I was still checking casualties and equipment, when I was called for lunch. I ate very quickly as we needed to take Afikpo that night. Sunny Tuoyo and Utuk were also busy commending the efforts of the S&T for the quick arrival of the hot meal, while using tooth picks made from palm fronds, when one of the natives said that they had prepared the meals to welcome the federal troops, with about 20 big pots of *gari* and soup.

That was nice of the people of Ugep. The chiefs of the town joined us in the meal. I had meat for the first time in the war front and that was nice. But little did we know that the meat used for the soup was **human flesh**, possibly from Biafran casualties. I had eaten about four pieces already before realising what was happening. This was a delicacy of the people of the area. When I later told the story at Calabar, Col. Adekunle asked me, "How was it?" and I said it was tender. I must have eaten the rump part of the steak.

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When we all got to know afterwards, everybody looked at me and I just asked why they were all looking at me? In any case, I had already eaten and that was it and I was not ready to vomit. It was only Major Aliyu that did not eat with us, as

he was busy handing over Afikpo to 1 Division, since we had been recalled to Calabar.

The advance that I had thought would take us three months to the objective, took less than 30 days, because we got used to the terrain. The Biafran troops had thought that Oban hills would be impassable, and again, we found out that our worst nightmare was not as bad as we had expected, and our training paid off after all. Above all, we did not encounter serious Biafran defences until we had captured and assembled at Adim, which was our rendezvous. We had two-inch mortars, 81 mm mortars and machine guns as artillery pieces were difficult to carry in the jungle. So we left our artillery pieces with the two battalions at Mbebu for long-range shelling of Oban and beyond, while we infiltrated behind enemy lines.

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The capture of Obubra

The Biafran troops then reacted to our advance and withdrew troops from their defensive positions at Ekan and Oban into Ugep so quickly that they had little or no time for proper defence and digging of trenches. Their casualties at Ugep were thus heavy, and our capture of Obubra was a piece of cake. The two battalions at Mbebu then captured Oban and Ekan in one fell swoop. The reason for calling us back to Calabar was that we had to capture Port Harcourt before or by May 1968, because there was to be a conference at Kampala in Uganda organised by OAU on the Nigeria/Biafra war and Nigeria needed to capture Port Harcourt before the conference. 1 Division then took over Afikpo from 3MCDO while we withdrew to Calabar. We left a battalion each behind at Ikot Okporo and at Ugep, while Utuk brought 8 Battalion back to Calabar with 12 Brigade

commanded by Aliyu, and 13 Brigade commanded by Sunny Tuoyo.

With these moves, it was possible to receive our supplies by road. We could evacuate our casualties easier through I Division and we could easily receive reinforcements and more importantly, we closed Biafra's international land route to the outside world through Cameroon at Ikom and at Nssakpa.

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Chapter Six

RETURN FROM OBUBRA

By 12 noon on Monday of March 11th 1968, the officers and I were back at Calabar from Obubra. Adekunle was to brief all of us on the Port Harcourt advance at 16.00p.m. on Monday March, 11th 1968. It took about 10 days for the main troops to arrive back at Calabar from Obubra. As it were, the training of the men had gone well in Calabar, while the advance to Obubra was a good fire baptism for the three brigades and the officers.

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Before we left for Obubra, three incidents had taken place at Calabar that are worth mentioning here. The *first* was the capture of a lady at the waterside in Calabar. The question was how she got there undetected. She told us her story of travelling by Elder Dempster ferry from Calabar to Oron to see her sick friend at Uyo Annua Hospital on October 15th, 1967. But by the 18th 3MCDO troops had landed at Calabar and she was cut off on the Biafran side at Oron unable to come back to Calabar.

Some fishermen and the lady Ms. Elizabeth Ekpenyong, were arrested and brought to me. After series of interrogations, we let her go but we were not sure if she was a Biafran agent or not, as what she did was very daring to have crossed from Oron to Calabar by canoe at night from 9.00p.m. to 5.00a.m. under cover of darkness. We kept up serious surveillance on the lady and the fishermen. That was eight hours trip by paddled dug-out canoe, on such a large expanse, dangerous, and fast flowing river. This young lady was just about 20 years old. On the third day, we received a

report that she did not leave her home and was indoors since our last encounter with her. So, we sent for her and the fishermen, to take our men on the same trip across the water from Calabar to Oron on the mainland.

Locals as intelligence agents

We gave them the tasks of getting information on enemy positions, the terrain, and how many they were. They did not have to write down anything and they did not have to give themselves away. To be able to appreciate how many the Biafran troops were at a location, it was enough to see the size of their cooking pot. Elizabeth and the fishermen went and came back the fifth day. Not only did they come back with more information than we had expected, they came back with four other ladies and two other fishermen. Their information was most useful. One of the ladies came all the way from Umuahia and the other three from Opobo. They knew the routes and the positions of the Biafran troops. I was able to update my maps accordingly. We were told that there were many more of these ladies and fishermen that were cut off at the mainland in Oron area, who had travelled there from Calabar when 3MCDO troops landed at Calabar in October 1967, and had no way of returning home to Calabar. The point in emphasising this incident is that the Nigerian Army had no intelligence gathering capability throughout the war. At least, no intelligence reports ever reached me as documents coming from the Army HQ in Lagos, at least not any that we in 3MCDO knew of. Thereafter, with so much achieved through these ladies and the fishermen, Elizabeth was made their leader and attached to the signal corps of 3MCDO, under Capt Arinye.

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They went into the mainland at Oron and back with such ease, and with more information. These ladies formed the nucleus of the 3MCDO ladies, and the fishermen were very useful in all our regional intelligence gathering efforts for 3MCDO operations, both on the mainland of Annang province and in Calabar and its environs. A total of 52 of these ladies were recruited for various jobs ranging from scouts to nurses, doctors, cooks, stewards and the lot, but only 30 of them survived the war. Without these ladies, our operations in Calabar area and all of 3MCDO operational areas during the civil war and the Atlantic coast areas would have been very difficult.

The *second* situation was at Nwaniba on the western side of the Cross River between Uyo and Itu. After the Christmas and New Year parties, on January 5th 1968, I went on inspection of the front lines and there was an attack. The brigade commander, Major Sunny Tuoyo was with me and so was the battalion Commander, Lt. Haruna. We all jumped into trenches around while the firing went on. In the trench that I jumped into, were a marine commando soldier and a lady. I told the soldier that it was better for him to be shot in the attack and killed, because I was going to kill him myself anyway, for having a lady inside the trench. Then the firing continued. When the soldier's magazine of 20 rounds of ammunition was finished, the lady reloaded another magazine for the soldier, and the soldier continued firing while the lady again reloaded the second magazine. By so doing, the soldier did not stop firing which enhanced the unit's fire power, and when they beat back the attacking Biafran troops, they hugged and did not even notice my presence. I just walked away and told the officers what I saw

and what happened, but did not go back there again. However, an order was sent to all units to get rid of all ladies in their operational areas. I did not bother to check if the order was obeyed. I left that to the various commanders to implement accordingly.

Prisoners of war dilemma

Thirdly, (as previously mentioned) we had so many prisoners of war and we did not know what to do with them. We did not have enough troops to be able to have extra for guard duties at the prisoners of war (POW) camp. Apart from guarding them, we had to feed them and make them comfortable. There was no electricity and no water. Adekunle then called a meeting of the commanders to discuss what to do with the POW particularly the logistics. If we were to have ONE Nigeria as we profess, then in view of all of our problems as a fighting unit, there were options: to immediately evacuate them to Lagos; to let them go back to Biafra; to recruit them into the Nigerian Army of 3MCDO or to kill them all. *Firstly* to return them to Lagos was very difficult. The planes that brought us ammunition and supplies were either Fokker Friendship planes with less than 100 seats or DC3 of the same capacity, and, they came, may be once a week. We had over 400 POW on hold at Calabar prisons. As we advanced, many were still being captured and many more surrendered on their own. We had a problem. *Secondly*, to let them go back to Biafra would be begging for trouble. They were going back to reinforce the Biafran Army - we could not afford that, owing to the fact that they already knew too much about our positions and officers, and they also knew about our strength. *Thirdly*, to recruit them into 3MCDO may be a disaster as they could wake up one night and decide to kill all of us.

In military strategy, this is called a dilemma. Whichever way we looked, we lost. Adekunle then came up with the idea that we should take a chance of letting them go back to their homes, but for those who wanted to be recruited into 3MCDO, they should be allowed to do so. Wow, that was terrifying but it worked. Adekunle addressed them on ONE Nigeria and that they were allowed to go back home, or join the 3MCDO. Many opted to join the 3MCDO surprisingly, and only about 20 out of about 400 opted to go back because of their aged parents. So, we sent them to the Sea Training School established at Atimbo, commanded by Isaac Adaka Boro.

Anytime I went to inspect Isaac Boro's training school, I was particularly interested in these people. Boro told me that for the first one week, all of them slept with one eye open. But they finally gave a good account of themselves. They went on patrols with our troops, and came back, they went as guides on reconnaissance, (recce) and they performed creditably. I was encouraged. That was how we recruited Biafran soldiers throughout the war into 3MCDO. In 3MCDO, we had no POW camp, we had no refugee camps, because we allowed everybody to go home. Even when we eventually captured places like Aba and Owerri, and until the war ended in all core Ibo areas, we did not take POW and there were no refugees. They were all told to go home or join the army. Some of them were taken for interrogation only and were later released especially the officers among them who had maps.

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When the radio station at Calabar was captured, Mr. Alloysious Ekanem was the only broadcaster in town. We

were able to fuel his electric generator, to enable it to operate for few hours per day, and to be able to announce accordingly as necessary, particularly the news items, that we wanted all refugees to go back home, because it was ONE Nigeria. But from every twelve, there could be a Judas. It was during one of our 'recce' operations along Creek Town to Nwaniba that we caught five Biafrans that were going to poison water at Calabar. During interrogation, we found out that one of Adekunle's friends, whose marriage costs Adekunle bankrolled, was a double agent for 3MCDO and for Biafra. This same person had assisted us tremendously in organising the civil defence. A very energetic and hard working person indeed. Mr. Archibong was their contact person in Calabar.

Mr. Archibong gave us accurate information about Biafran troop movements and counter-attacks. The one that beat me the most was that in which he warned us about the day and time of Biafran troops counter-attack at Odukpani and he was correct to the minute. Counter-attack was expected but not the time, date and position as accurately as he advised us. He was Adekunle's friend indeed, as he had helped us many times with information on Biafran troops' positions.

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On Monday March 11th 1968, Adekunle ordered that he would like to see my plan for the advance to Port Harcourt in 48 hours. He gave me all the maps needed for the plan. They were the 1965 colonial maps of Eastern Nigeria. The debate was scheduled for 9.00a.m. on March 14th, 1968 in his office rather than at his house. Adekunle worked anywhere, even in his toilet, his work papers and maps and reference books, pencils, crayons, erasers, blades, reams of paper and packets of cigarettes were everywhere. I felt that

if there was any war anywhere in the world in which Adekunle would fight, he could count on me. Right or wrong, I would be there with this man, I thought.

I have been deputy to many commanders all my military life - from Major Hoyle, a British officer in 1961/62, to Major Wakeman, another British officer in 1962/63, company commander at 4th Battalion at Ibadan in 1963/64 with Lt. Col. Abogo Largema, tactics instructor at NMTC (Nigerian Military Training College) at Kaduna in 1965, with Lt. Col. Ogbugo Kalu, deputy to Major Igboha in 1967 at 4th Area Command at Benin City, deputy to Adekunle 1968/69 at 3MCDO, deputy to Col. Oluleye in 1971/72 at Ibadan 2 Division, deputy to Obasanjo at 3MCDO and I was deputy to Danjuma in 1976/77. Each one of them went on leave but never me. In my entire military career from 1960 to 1977, I went on leave only once in 1966, just before Major Nzeogwu's coup. I knew these people very well and how their minds worked, but none was like Adekunle. He had presence of mind, and more so today that he has also learnt the lessons of life.

Debating the Port Harcourt attack

On the morning of Thursday March 14th, 1968, the debate started. Of course, Adekunle had made his own plans. My plan was different from his, and out of the way. Fair enough, he was ready to listen. He was not convinced at first but as I continued, he sat up and got more interested in my points. Akinrinade, who was based at Bonny Island had given him all the intelligence reports of the area, and since he (Akinrinade) was on the ground, his facts and figures were correct. His maps were more accurate than mine and so was his appreciation of the situation from his point of view of being based at Bonny Island.



During this debate, a report came in, that Akinrinade had sent an officer, Captain Remi Roberts, to Lagos for supplies and that the officer was shot and killed at Apapa wharf in Lagos. As at the time of writing this book and like many others after that, there has been no report I know of about who killed Remi Roberts. Akinrinade's brigade was then brought under the command of Adekunle for many reasons and to relieve Akinrinade from pressure of having to send people to Lagos for his supplies. Adekunle, of course, was up to it. He immediately sent all that Akinrinade needed - from food to ammunition, drinks and medicine. He got them from our overflowing stores.

Adekunle, once again, left me to update my plan, in line with the new information from Akinrinade at Bonny Island. Adekunle came back on Tuesday March 19th, 1968 to Calabar with four plane loads of more supplies. The contractors in Lagos loved him while the other divisional commanders who did not have the same charisma, hated his guts because he was always getting what he wanted. However, armed with Akinrinade's reports and the reports from the 3MCDO ladies and the intelligence group which, by then, totalled 16 ladies and 20 fishermen under the command of Capt. Arinye, the signal officer, we continued planning. Reports came from as far as Port Harcourt itself regarding the positions of Biafran troops, their morale and even their type of weapons.

How did we assess their morale? Well, if two or three were smiling and some sad especially while collecting their food, one would know. Wounded troops also talked more at the hospitals. The ladies needed to go there as floor cleaners. I had a good nest full of information, and reports had come also from as far as Umuahia. Armed with these facts, I stuck

to my recommendation that advancing from Calabar would be a better approach and option than from Bonny Island. It would also be unexpected.

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Above are some of the 3MCDO ladies who were an integral part of the march from Calabar to Port Harcourt. They took records, cared for wounded troops, fetched firewood, cooked our meals, etc. Many of them were maimed, some were killed by Biafran home-made landmines. But a latter-day commander who did not see these ladies in action thought they were recruited for socials!! It was a callous and unfair assessment of their roles.

80 kilometres versus 480 kilometres

Adekunle's counter-option was to capture Port Harcourt through Bonny Island which was only 80 kilometres away. My plan was to capture Port Harcourt from Calabar, a distance of 480 kilometres which was termed the biblical Israelites' journey. Well, the debate continued and the more I explained the strategy rather than the tactics, the more Adekunle was convinced to accept my plan. However, he had some reservations, naturally, as to how the plan would work.

For example, he came up with questions about the food supply for about 40,000 men and women advancing over 480 kilometres. That took a whole day to debate. I had thought of everything including the terrain, inclement weather, the rivers overflowing their banks at that time of the year with particular reference to the crossing of the Opobo River which was the longest, and widest in the area.

We discussed how the troops would be paid their allowances while their full salaries were to be paid to their families back home as allotments. Even little details like change of socks, supply of raincoats and 'housewives' did not escape attention. 'Housewives', in the army, means needle and thread, should we have torn shorts or shirts or lost buttons. This was what Col. Obasanjo needed when he visited one of my units at Azumini. The button at the centre of his stomach snapped and George Innih asked for my 'housewife'. I got my orderly to sew the button. Obasanjo said, "So you have everything here?" I was happy and proud to say, "this is 3MCDO".

Back to the planning for the capture of Port Harcourt, Adekunle was still not fully convinced. He ordered that my final plan be discussed the next day as early as 7.00a.m. I was ready. Adekunle had given me ten maps for my plan since Monday March 11th. I had always briefed him on one map. This time I came with all the maps fully prepared with crayons in different colours. I was more interested in discussing the strategy. Although I was also convinced that the 80 kilometres approach from Bonny Island could succeed, I presented the pros and cons of both options.

This meeting was at his house and at 13.00p.m. we had to break for lunch. I think he was convinced but he still wanted more debates. He advised that I should leave my plans and maps exactly as they were spread out in his lounge. I did not want to do so because I still had a few more points to write about and more maps to draw. During the two hours he gave me for lunch, I could achieve more, as the debate was no more on tactics but on strategy. Secondly, I was afraid that my maps and plans could be compromised by people coming and going at will in his house. As the commander, people came in and went at will to Adekunle's house, especially his friends from Lagos. Almost everybody in

Calabar town wanted to see the commander for one thing or the other. Adekunle had time for everybody. He was very friendly and approachable to all the natives. In return, they gave us security and help. We resumed our discussions at 15.00p.m. Adekunle had not had his lunch, but why?

image

He was going through our discussions and the pros and cons of the two plans, when I asked if he needed more time and he said yes. I was happy about that, as I needed more time myself to put some finishing touches to my plan as well, especially as he had started to see my plan as feasible. However, I also understood his points about using Bonny Island as the base from where to launch the attack on Port Harcourt. How can anyone, especially a military person want to believe that a 480 kilometres journey across mangrove and swampy forest would be preferred to one of 80 kilometres, especially when we were not on picnic or site-seeing exercise, but were pursuing the same objective and the same aim? My version was tough to sell. I knew, because time was of essence, especially when we needed to achieve all these in just 30 days.

"Alright, we will continue tomorrow at 7.00a.m." he said.

"Yes sir, I replied."

It was now the fourth day on the same subject. The training continued more vigorously, especially the first aid, the boating, and the boat paddling, the swimming and 'fasting'. The 'fasting' this time was not for prayers, but for the troops to get used to food not being ready until 5.00p.m. daily. Actually, I was planning about half-starving everyone in order to have enough for all. There would be no wastage, no matter how small. We could not afford that. So we made

sure, however, that food was ready every 5.00p.m. The reason again, was to ensure that no one would complain if the hot meals arrived late and that we would have, at least one good meal a day. Capt. Akinyanju of the S&T (Supply and Transport) was up to it. The meals came and any meal before 5.00 p.m. was considered a snack. Then came the first serious rain in Calabar on Saturday March 30th, 1968. The whole town was flooded. I went to see the forward trenches; they were filled with water and very uncomfortable. Troops looked for anything and everything to stand on in their water-logged trenches to avoid trench foot. That further gave me an idea of what the Biafran troops in defensive positions would be going through during the attack. Their trenches would be flooded, and they would run into any house or houses around, which would be better targets for artillery fire. The rain came with lightning and thunder and was very torrential for two days. But it was a good lesson on what to expect during the advance to Port Harcourt. However, I needed one more important piece of information, and I would not rest until I got it. It was details about high and low tides as might affect the selected landing sites.

Concerns over Biafran counter-attack

The strategy after landing at Oron was to be a "Blitzkrieg strategy" with speed, surprise and punch. The plan was outlined from Calabar to Port Harcourt and even beyond. On the fifth day, the debates continued and Adekunle wanted to know if I had any questions or some concerns, that he was going to Lagos for just two days. I guess to show the plans to the Army HQ, perhaps to Gen Gowon, the Commander-in-Chief as well.

My concerns were that after Port Harcourt would have been captured, the entire Biafran armed forces would likely be

upon us. Thus we must be ready for a very serious and bloody counter-attack. We must have enough supplies, reinforcements and boots and socks, especially after 30 days of trekking in the mangrove and rain forests and swampy river beds. We would need new boots and socks, as the terrain thereafter would be different and there would not be much by way of mangrove forests but more of savannah and grassland. The tactics and the organogram must change at that point to reflect new realities. There were numerous roads criss-crossing the entire Iboland, which would require more men to hold, including armoured vehicles and artillery pieces as long-range weapons. All of this would be occurring in Ibo heartland, bereft of sympathetic minority ethnic groups.

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The vanishing of Adekunle's maps

Before we finished talking, Adekunle began looking for his three maps; not one was found. The only person that had been in the house was Mr. Archibong; because it was a weekend. Hell was let loose. As I mentioned earlier, patrols had captured five people at the waterside trying to cross into Calabar carrying two jerry cans of a substance later identified as poison. Their intention was to poison the local water works, and on these five men were found large amounts of coins which were the only legal tender between Nigeria and Biafra as Nigeria had changed its currency. Their contact at Calabar was Archibong. Therefore, his house was ordered to be searched. This was the same Archibong, Adekunle's friend, noted earlier. Many other implicating items were found in his house but not the wanted maps, even after a thorough search.

Archibong shot for espionage

Mr. Archibong, the double agent, was later executed for espionage. Thank God, they were not my maps that were stolen. Adekunle's maps outlined an attack on Port Harcourt from Bonny, while my plan was to make Bonny a plan 'B'. This must have led the Biafrans into believing that Port Harcourt would be attacked from Bonny, a belief that would later cost them dearly as we changed that plan while still making them believe so. Rightly enough, Bonny to Port Harcourt was less than 80 kilometres while Calabar to Port Harcourt was about 480 kilometres. Who, in his right senses as a military commander would, in a war setting, make his men to march 480 kilometres instead of 80 kilometres for the same objective and for the same reason? To prove my points, I drew many maps and a total of sixteen maps were approved by my commander. These were maps for each commander, the ambush map, the rendezvous map, the envelopment map, logistics maps, maps for crossing points, roads, culverts and bridges, and for medicals, including bulk breaking points. The debate, of course, continued as usual on every subject leading to the capture of Port Harcourt. Then Adekunle told me to ask any questions on the subject.

At this point, I had three questions. The first one concerned the portable and mobile operation radio. The RS 301 operation radio which we had was heavy and only vehicle mounted. Then we revisited the issue of how to hold the ground if and when we captured Port Harcourt, as we envisaged that the Biafran counter-attack would be very bloody. Finally, we discussed how to document allowances for advancing soldiers who might want to smoke cigarettes or buy kola nuts while their full salaries were to be paid to their next of kin back home.

He agreed that these were thoughtful questions and I should put my expected answers in writing for his consideration, which I did. Adekunle went back to Lagos and shipped in tons of supplies. We were told that contracts were awarded for the supply of mobile operational radios as demanded, and next of kin documents designed at Calabar for troops' salary were taken to Lagos for printing including what we called "Noticas" forms. These were forms to notify families of casualties as and when they occurred. Everything went well. In the meantime we continued training in earnest for plans A' and 'B' for the capture of Port Harcourt. I concentrated on plan A' for the capture of Port Harcourt while I knew that Akinrinade would have no problems with plan 'B'. Adekunle sent more colonial maps of Port Harcourt (50 copies each) and 1965 maps of Eastern Nigeria including physical and road maps of small scales but detailed enough for the purpose they were intended. From January to April 1968, in addition to Special Forces Training, there was massive recruitment of men and women from the local areas.

Swimming was considered the most important because of the width of the Opobo River, which was about three hundred metres wide at the selected likely crossing points. Isaac Boro had recruited over 3000 swimmers drawn from his native Ijaw area and the Calabar area. Their training made them able to swim about three hundred metres with their kits on. It was not easy but the training went on regardless. We needed the women for intelligence work, which they performed creditably. Adekunle was pleased after inspecting the training at different centres. The medical, the infantry, the canoe paddlers, the drivers, the lady's signal training under Captain Arinye, and of course, the map reading.

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Special Forces Training

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Adekunle was particularly fascinated by the divers, swimming and sniper training programmes of the special forces and how we thought of them. Then we had to ask for authority to recruit more ladies as we were still short of them at that time. Women recruits were to be put in uniform immediately, since the first lady escort to be recruited who had no uniform died of tetanus en route Uyo, while on patrol.

As usual, we retired to his office in Calabar and started the debate again. Most of the available senior officers were usually at those debates. He finally agreed to plan "A," and the rest is history. The war effort was made easier but would have been far more difficult without the intelligence reports from the 3MCDO ladies. Many died, some were maimed and when the war ended, they were told to go away with nothing except the memories of their war efforts and those of their dead and maimed comrades. It is a very sad part of the history of unrecognised efforts of women in our country. All the officers who knew why they were recruited, who saw and appreciated their efforts during the war are no more in any position to discuss this issue. Even Adekunle himself has

since been discredited and unceremoniously thrown out of the military, and his successor, Obasanjo, thought that they were recruited for socials. What an irony!

Logistics nightmare

We were unorthodox, but our strategy and plans in 3MCDO were original to us. We took cognisance of the fact that officers and men on both sides of the civil war attended the same military training schools at home in Nigeria and abroad, and that our thinking and methods of approach to military problems would probably be similar, especially in military tactics. For 3MCDO to succeed we had to be different and that meant to be unorthodox. Our terrain was different and so was the weather in our area of operation in the southern Atlantic compared with the rest of 1st and 2nd Divisions of the Nigerian Army. 3MCDO was locked in, without any escape route.

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Our supplies came by ship from Lagos - a minimum of 21 to 30 days turnaround loading time not included. We had only Calabar airport for air supplies with two planes, one Fokker Friendship and one DC-3, both only able to carry about 200 men and their luggage. Medical evacuation of the dead and wounded was difficult as these planes came, may be once a month or at best twice. There was no electricity and mortuary facilities were difficult, unlike in 1 and 2 Divisions in Benin City and Enugu where soldiers could drive home by road at will, with electricity for their mortuary, dry wood for their cooking and salary to their families. For many of our officers and men, the day that they were recruited into the army was the last day they saw their families and many

were buried in unmarked graves all over the operation area. Above all, the officers of Biafra were the best there were in the Nigerian Army, and I mean the best. How do we face these men in battle especially now that we were getting close to their home base? We thought that they must be luring us into their well prepared killing grounds in Ibo heartland.

Adekunle with his stern and 'Field Marshal' look wept almost daily at the news of lost ground or position or at the death of a well-known officer or soldier. He was kind-hearted indeed, and always unhappy when we had casualties. Since the death of Capt. Buba Yaro was caused by lack of vehicles, anytime he went to Lagos, he asked for more and more vehicles. So when he saw the drivers' training which I organised, he just could not hug me publicly but he spoke about it almost everyday and appreciated and liked me the more.

Adekunle often went to Lagos. He did not take no for an answer. He got everything he asked for. What Lagos did not give him, he commandeered. He fought everybody that stood in his way on this subject. He set up an operational radio in Lagos for a direct link to me at the war front for daily situation reports. He was confident to leave the division under my command and control, while away getting supplies in Lagos. As a matter of fact, I rested more when he was back in the war front, than when he was away.

There were officers who were called 'Rear Commanders', who handled administration and logistic problems in support of the troops at the war front, especially for those with special cases like the landlocked 3MCDO. Col. Adekunle commanded his troops in the war front from Lagos. He worked day and night. We were all used to restless days and sleepless nights while he was away. Everytime he came

back from Lagos, he looked sick. The war front gave him some rest at least. We were all ready to move. All officers knew what to do, where to go, but only when to go was what we were waiting for. They knew the strategy, the tactics, the guerilla operations behind enemy lines, the swimmers, the administration and logistics, the bulk breaking points, the padres, both Christians and Muslims, the cooking points, the reserve positions and finally, the rendezvous including Military Police (MP) sign posts. The signposts alone filled a 3-ton lorry - which included water points, feeding points, cooking points, command posts, each unit line including civilian limit line. Their traffic control was above average. We thought of everything in detail. We rehearsed, we trained, we discussed and we debated. We were fully ready to go and only waiting for Col. Adekunle's orders for the 'D-Day' and the 'H-hour' hour when the advance would start. The navy, the air force, and all the supporting arms and services were ready. We only knew at that time when to get to Port Harcourt. Isaac Boro needed three days ahead of the main body of the advancing troops, while I needed seven days head start due to my enveloping and ambush plan.

Akinrinade was to move from Bonny and advancing towards Onne when Opobo would have been captured after 12 days of our leaving Calabar, so we needed his help to assist the main body of our landing troops in controlling their landing. We needed all available hands at that stage.

Finally, Adekunle arrived in Calabar on Thursday April 4th, 1968 to reconfirm his orders to capture Port Harcourt not later than 12.00p.m. on May 30th 1968. He addressed all the officers and men at their various units. He inspected all the training centres once more, and all the intelligence reports that came in from the ladies that were sent out to collect information from Itu, Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Oron, Eket, Abak, Etinan, Opobo and as far as to Port Harcourt. They did

not have to write down any report while out in the field. They were told that by merely looking at the cooking pot of the military, it was possible to guess how many troops were in the area. We needed to know about their morale and preparedness, and the effects of high and low tides on the landing sites in particular. By the time Adekunle arrived from Lagos, we had already drawn a map of likely Biafran positions, and the obstacles, (which were mainly rivers).

The Biafrans were known for blowing culverts and bridges on their way, and so we planned how to get our supplies across these rivers. From our intelligence reports, we knew enough about enemy positions to make our final plan for the advance. We had enough supplies including medicines and ammunition to last three months at the least. On the map, we had selected three bulk breaking points in Phase 1, which were Abak, Etinan, and Opobo, while in Phase 2, Aletu Eleme would be the administration and logistic centre.

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The main body was to land at Oron on Wednesday 17th April, 1968 and in thirty days must capture Port Harcourt. Isaac Boro's position and route of advance was critical to the success of the entire main body's advance. He was to land at James Town some kilometres southwest of Oron three days before the main body landing at Oron. This was the deception plan and it must not fail. All the intelligence teams that went to that area came back with reports of no military presence on that route up to Okoro Ete, and Okoro Inyang. Biafran troops were only located at big cities like Oron, Eket and Opobo, not at James Town, Ibono, and up to Ikot Akpanata, and had no patrols. The Biafran troops thought that the area was impregnable and impassable. I had to make sure of this. So, I went with Isaac Boro and three of the scouts to 'recce' (reconnoitre) the route. It took

all day and all night in four dinghy, inflatable boats in an uncharted large expanse of water to and fro. Wow! It was better imagined than experienced. It was a very dangerous adventure mined with sudden death possibilities.

True to their word and reports, there was no military presence up to Ibono where we turned back. The stage was set for the landing and the beginning of the end of Biafra. The area was swampy and very marshy especially at Widenham Creek. Isaac Boro taught me how to walk in the swamp. "Sir, use your toes like dancing ballet," he said. Adekunle recalled Akinrinade to Calabar from Bonny Island for the final briefing on the advance to Port Harcourt. We were not sure of what name to call the operation. We started with - 'Operation Sea Lion,' then to 'Operation Wooden Leg,' because it was going to be a long journey of about 480 kilometres on foot without vehicles and we must get there by noon on May 30th, 1968.

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In military tactics, you have not captured a place until, after at least, a week of being on the ground. In football, the game is not over until the final whistle. So, in my briefing to the officers and men on the advance to Port Harcourt, my order was that Port Harcourt must be captured by 8.00 a.m. on May 20th, 1968 and that was it. Many reminded me that the commander said 12 noon on May 30th, 1968. My answer was simple: "Obey the last order" and that was the last order. On Monday April 8th at 10.00a.m. Adekunle addressed all troops, officers and men, and outlined the strategic reasons for the hurry.

image

Why Port Harcourt must be taken within 30 days

Why 30 days? There was going to be a conference of Nigeria and Biafra at Kampala in Uganda from May 25th to 30th, 1968 and Nigeria must capture Port Harcourt for that and many other reasons. It was thought that with Bonny in federal hands and Port Harcourt secured before the conference, Biafra would be cut off from the oil fields and their source of income for further prosecuting the war. He warned troops against looting, stressing that 3MCDO was locked in, so whatever was looted could not be taken anywhere and that one might be dead the next day. He also warned about raping women — since we had no withdrawal route to fall back on, one might never know who would help you or hide you if you had to escape.

"You may find yourself in the hands of those you caused pains," Adekunle told the troops.

I am very proud to say today, that although, I would not describe Adekunle and officers and men of 3MCDO as angels, definitely, we were not devils. I am very proud of Adekunle and what he stood for. We looked after the civilians and the Biafrans alike. We fed the Biafrans, clothed them, recruited them, treated their wounded at our hospitals and clinics, and those who wanted to go back to Biafra were allowed to go. Before they left, we addressed them on ONE Nigeria. The strategy worked. Those who went back told stories of how they were well treated and looked after and were told to go home. This was unbelievable. I had an ex-Biafran soldier orderly who went and came back and he is still my orderly till today. His name is Amechi Ekaeze.

It was, therefore, astonishing that, the same Adekunle who debated strategy and tactics with me and all the officer, of

3MCDO, the same commander who went to Lagos and returned with tons of supplies, ammunition, weapons, uniforms and reinforcements, began to see things differently when Port Harcourt was captured. It could not be true.

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Why Adekunle was not at Calabar to Port Harcourt 30 days' advance

It all began on Sunday morning of March 24th, 1968. The rains had not started in full, but we had few showers in Calabar and all stores were filled up with whatever we needed for the move — from food to needle and thread. We had assorted drinks — just name them. Then Adekunle asked if I would like to go to Lagos and get all the supplies we would need to hold Port Harcourt, as we had discussed, and as we were then aware that we would be moving into Biafra's heartland and the fact that the Biafrans would defend Port Harcourt to the last man due to its strategic, economic and military importance to them, I declined. We were also aware of the shortcomings of those who were to handle all these logistic problems at the rear, in Lagos. The Port Harcourt airport was Biafra's last contact with the outside world.

Get to Port Harcourt we will, but holding it will be tough. The debate went on until Saturday March 30th, 1968. I use the word *debate* advisedly in this book because, with Adekunle, his style of command was not just barking out orders. He would rather discuss his points and he wanted me to come up with points that could be better than his, if any. However, when he had to give the orders, you would know who the commander was — Adekunle, of course. Finally, we agreed that he should go to Lagos and do exactly what he did to get so much done within such a short time, and that Lagos

would be very difficult for me. We lacked nothing and morale was high. The training also went well in his absence. He was afraid of leaving the entire division to me because, should anything go wrong, he would be blamed for it.

Well, I told him to go, and I promised to be worthy of his trust, that nothing would go wrong, and that if and when I needed help, I would let him know, after all, he would only be less than two hours flight away from the division. I further explained my reasons behind the plans of advance and what I expected to achieve at each stage of the plan up to Port Harcourt. He was going to get daily briefings on the situation on ground twice a day, and he would have to call me. I knew that he was not going to be sitting in an office and that my operational radio to him would be open all the time.

I said that once Isaac Boro's deception plan worked, the landing at Oron would follow, then the rest should be a piece of cake, and that we would make Port Harcourt in 30 days, God willing. The aim would be to breach enemy defences, make them attack before they were ready, in a direction different from their well prepared defensive positions, and dug-in sites at Oron, and that once they withdrew from there towards Isaac Boro, then the main body of 3MCDO led by Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo, would land at Oron. This should then lead to a pursuit and exploitation phase until we got to Opobo River.

Adekunle wanted to see the first week of the plan, which he did. I went over the plans with all officers everyday, particularly the strategy, and the tactics. The logistics support, the fire power, the deception plans, the role of Lt. Col. Abubakar, the most senior Hausa officer in 3MCDO, who was our Quartermaster-General, and our spokesperson for the division from the landing at Oron until the capture of

Port Harcourt. Copies of Abubakar's speeches were well prepared and rehearsed. We thought that, since 3MCDO troops were well received at Calabar and our intelligence reports also confirmed the alienation of the people of Annang by Biafran troops, we should cash-in on that. We rehearsed every move and every speech. We were ready. Each officer knew what to do and it became a classroom training and lecture which we called Tactical Exercise Without Troops (TEWT). Each officer came forward and repeated his roles from Calabar up to Port Harcourt, even without holding any paper or map. We made models. Each commander then went back to his sector, for his officers to do the same. A model of the route and the battle plan was made in my war room. Adekunle was impressed. Then he turned to me in front of all the officers and said, "You know, I never thought of some of these points made here."

Adekunle was then getting confident that all the plans would work and be successful. I said that I didn't expect it would be easy, but we would adjust as we moved on. All officers gave me their support, especially Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo who was the most senior of us all, but he was also very co-operative indeed. I was just Chief of Staff of the division. He made my work very easy, and he showed good example as a great leader and an elder.

Adekunle was properly briefed on what happened, what was happening and what we envisaged would happen next on daily basis. I was personally afraid that Biafran High Command could simply be luring the 3MCDO into a killing ground by letting us march over 480 kilometres from Calabar to Port Harcourt just to hit us hard from our right flank at Ikot-Okpora, Ikot Ekpene, Aba, Owerri and at Omoku. Any heavy punch would unbalance and possibly finish us, but we were fully prepared with mobile and heavily equipped reserves of a battalion each at strategic

locations at Itu with Lt. Col. Obeya's 18 Brigade, Major Tuoyo at Uyo with his 13 Brigade, and Major Aliyu at Bori Ogoni with his 12 Brigade.

For weeks, we waited for the counter-attack, which never came and when it came, it was so feeble that it meant nothing to the troops. It was then that we knew we had captured Port Harcourt for good. It was noon of May 18th, 1968. Port Harcourt was captured and all officers and men were tired. I know that because I had blisters on my feet like many of the troops.

THE CHALLENGES

3MCDO Sector - Atlantic Theatre

BEFORE the 30-day march from Calabar to Port Harcourt in the wet season of April and May 1968, I had some ideas of what challenges were before all of us and particularly the troops. Even when we finally confronted these challenges with determination and zeal, they turned out to be more nightmarish than had been expected. We did not give up. The fact was that we had no choice but to advance and face these challenges squarely. The terrain was inhibiting. The rains poured endlessly, the ground was muddy, the jungle was wet while the mangrove forest was infested with snakes and other dangerous crawling reptiles.

The forests were so thick that we had to use artillery in some places in antitank role, to cut through these forests for vision, and, at best, that gave us only a visibility of about 10 metres. It was like cutting traces in a land survey project. In stretches of this terrain, we were not only fighting the Biafrans, we were fighting the mangrove forest and the elements.

Visibility from the river banks was not more than just a couple of metres in front. Communication infrastructure in the entire area was very elementary indeed. Government ferry and canoes were used for transport and communication. On the roads, there were few culverts (most of which had been blown up by the Biafrans to delay our advance). There were no bridges on big rivers like the Opobo River, for instance. To make matters worse, it rained

almost everyday and night with lightning and thunder.
Rivers overflowed their banks.

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In several places, there were low and high tides, which I was briefed about and I read about in many reports during the planning stages, but I did not imagine the magnitude of the problem, until we confronted them at Opobo and at Okrika. Some of the rivers receded at night and returned full in the day.

It took us time to be conversant with this situation, but when we grasped it, we became masters of the situation, as all our river crossing operations took cognisance of these changes in tides. 'Home boy', Isaac Boro and his 19 Brigade special forces, were at home and at ease with fluctuations of the elements. Owing to the weather condition, terrain and swamps, the troops were frequently falling ill with malaria, cold, sneezing and pneumonia. With the incessant rain, they virtually had their bath with their clothes on, and the clothes dried on them as well.

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It was difficult to find dry space and for such rare spots, troops had to struggle with snakes that were also seeking dry spots from their flooded hibernating holes. Going to toilet at night was dangerous; one had to be watchful because of poisonous snakes around. Leaves substituted toilet rolls and it was a near tragic comedy to see soldiers and snakes struggling for dry space, albeit for different reasons.



Peculiar challenges

Unlike the other divisions, the 3MCDO had a peculiar challenge. 1 Division had the entire Nigerian Army behind them. There were the artillery units, 'recce' units, armoured units, supplies, food, men and materials, air force, and other supporting arms and services. There was also support in men and materials from all over Nigeria including recruits walking across the border from Niger Republic and Egyptian pilots to support the Nigerian Air Force in flying the Russian supplied jet fighters. Now then, compare the circumstances of these other divisions of the Nigerian Army with those of Adekunle's 3MCDO. There was actually no comparison. Soldiers of 2 Division from Benin City just drove to their various villages and homes at will to see their families. In contrast, 3MCDO faced Biafran fire as it advanced, with the sea and countless rivers and creeks in the rear. The choice was simple, to die by drowning or by bullet, or to fight on regardless of the situation.



3MCDO Operation problems

Operational Radios

The radios which were ever so important for communication and for command and control, (without which our military operations would have been very difficult indeed), needed dry cell batteries to operate. Many of these batteries went flat as there was no electricity to recharge them. We needed large quantities of radio batteries for operational reasons. There were ten men, specially assigned to radio battery charging alone for each unit. They had to travel to Lagos anytime there was flight to get the dead batteries fully charged and brought back to the war front. All these had to be sent to Lagos and brought back by flights bringing supplies which were not regular nor predictable.

Some petrol electricity generators were supplied but there was no fuel until towns like Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Eket, and Opobo had been captured. We also had a unit of ten female battery chargers per unit. Their jobs were to receive the batteries from the chargers for distribution and then hand over the dead ones for recharging. There was division of labour and everyone knew what to do with little or no supervision, including the cooks, firewood fetchers and stretcher bearers. There was a beehive of purposeful activities all over the place.

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Rivers

I knew little about high and low tides of these rivers that we had to cross, so I needed more information on the width, current, the timing for low and high tides and possible crossing points. At the crossing points, there were culverts and bridges but were there ferries or pontoons? Were there big boats or just dug-out canoes, or were their banks marshy, sandy or just firm ground? Did these canoes have motors or just paddles? How did the natives carry their wares around? I guessed their cargo ferry went many times around when there were many people with lots of goods to ferry. We sent patrols and our intelligence teams of 3MCDO ladies for the information, as there were no statistics anywhere to lay our hands on. In our case, we had as many as 40,000 troops, may be more, to cross the rivers and many tons of cargo as well.

\The dug-out canoes that we had could carry only six soldiers fully kitted or eight not kitted, at a time. We had all been trained on how to ride in these canoes because a little sneeze or cough may capsize the canoe. Many of us, including myself, had never travelled in a paddled canoe before let alone to go and face enemy bullets riding in one. So, how many canoes could we get and how many trips would they make to move all our troops across the river with our vehicles and stores? And we were not talking about one or two rivers, there were four major ones ahead. To appreciate this critical point we needed information about where the canoes were coming from and how far from our crossing points they were? That was why we had special units responsible for looking for canoes all over our captured areas. We found canoes in twos and threes. We needed over ten people to load each canoe into a lorry, and each lorry could carry only one at a time.

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With the scarcity of petrol, oil, and lubricants (POL), how did we keep the vehicles moving with the type of terrain? It was important to find out about the depth of these rivers, from the natives. Perhaps we could wade in and out of some of them: Our intelligence team of 3MCDO ladies and fishermen gave us most of the answers needed for planning, as most of them were natives of the area. All of this required detailed staff duties by my office. Otherwise, the Biafran troops would have regrouped at the west side of the rivers, and that would have slowed our advance considerably. We had to capture Port Harcourt in 30 days. Time was of the essence. Therefore, our planning was complete from beginning to the end. We only adjusted facts and figures as we advanced on the ground.

Weather and vegetation

Visibility was zero. The foliage was green and wet all day and all night. Last light was early and first light was late. On the 480 kilometres Calabar to Port Harcourt march, the vegetation was the same. Ambush was easy, locating enemy was difficult and collecting and evacuating casualties were also difficult because we did not have enough vehicles. Even where we found some local vehicles lying around, there was no fuel to run them. The need for large ferries to enable quick transportation of supplies and fast evacuation

of casualties was always there. Even though there was war, it was still a human society we were dealing with. So there had to be some business.

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The people were fishermen and farmers, yet there was hardly room for fishing and farming. This resulted in shortage of food and fresh water. Those with factories had no power, no raw materials, no funds, no banks, no workers and no markets. Movements were restricted. Everybody stayed home indoors, where they were not refugees. Even when they were refugees, they had no food where they were coming from or going to, especially the refugees returning to 3MCDO operational areas, which included elements of Biafran militia men and women, or some natives who were Biafran sympathisers. These were even more dangerous than the Biafrans. But we also had to be careful not to offend the returning natives with the road block stop and search operations. Therefore, there had to be road blocks to check returning refugees by locally arranged vigilantes, especially in a situation where we did not have enough fighting men. Only the military had food and trading was difficult. There was no money circulating and restocking was also very difficult.

Without the support of a happy civilian population, the position of the military in their area would be untenable. Civil administration was just as important as the military operations itself. We had to think of everything. Adekunle, therefore, included in his shopping lists when he went to Lagos for supplies, the assistance of police, customs and any

paramilitary units available from Lagos to relieve us of some of the pressure of having to be dealing with the civilian population in addition to the logistic problems of advancing troops.

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The people

Ibos were the main traders and business people all over Nigeria before the war and that included the non-Ibo areas of the 3MCDO operation. Now, they had gone back to their core Iboland with the advance of the federal troops. But we needed help from everywhere and anyone - be it civil defence, scouts, Red Cross, Girl Guides, and local vigilantes. To complicate matters, more than 40% of people and natives in Port Harcourt area had Ibo-like names.

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Food and movements were difficult for people, especially the aged and disabled males, females and children. Life was difficult for all. There were no hospitals for the civilian population. All the same, the war raged on with Ojukwu boasting on the radio day and night of having thrown the federal troops into the sea.

Biafran propaganda

Indeed, Biafra had a very formidable propaganda machine. For Biafrans, it gave hope (albeit a false one) to their people. But for our people at home, fears and tension. But

for us at the 3MCDO, it was encouraging because we knew they were lies. Over 60% of our casualties were not victims of gunshot wounds but of water-borne diseases, stomach problems, malaria, cholera, snake and reptile bites. Hygiene was very difficult. In our plan, we had considered all these problems and provided some answers as far as was possible before the advance. But a snake of over 50 feet length swallowed one of my soldiers and in order to kill the snake, we had to 'kill' the soldier who was already dead anyway. That was something really terrible. We even had an encounter with one elephant. Even the natives did not know that there were elephants in their vicinity.

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Transporting supplies

One of the most awful difficulties we had in the 3MCDO was logistics. It was such a huge and critical problem, but we had no choice than to find a way around it. Although we had a rear commander and staff in Lagos, they hardly visited the war front; so they could not appreciate the nature and magnitude of the problem. Even when we invited them to come, they just sat in Lagos. I never saw any of the rear staff at the war front. Before we returned from the war, most of them were alleged to have built houses and owned real estates at posh places across the country. To ensure a steady and regular supply, Adekunle had to travel many times to Lagos to ensure that supplies got to the forward troops on time and in the right quantities.

We had only 30 days to finish the assignment of capturing Port Harcourt from as far as 480 kilometres away. This started from Calabar. Troop movement with other logistics, without large ferries, was an incredible challenge. There was only one government ferry across Opobo River, which Isaac

Boro had captured intact, and along with our dug-out canoes, we moved tons of food and over 35,000 troops, their kits and other supplies including heavy weapons, ammunition and vehicles across Opobo River in particular. We mustered all we could to get us across the rivers but we just could not make the time that I planned for crossing Opobo river in particular. For this purpose we constructed a sizeable pontoon to assist in moving mobile resource troops to cater for the long line of defence of over 480 kilometres from Calabar to Port Harcourt, after other methods had failed.

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Building the home-made pontoon

I went to a corner and cried. Many people, officers, men, and natives made several suggestions, but all failed. To capture Port Harcourt by the target date was becoming difficult. So, I went to sleep and I could not sleep until after about an hour, an idea flashed my mind while I was praying that we could try building a pontoon, which we had thought about while at Calabar. We had only gained two days. For the idea of a pontoon to be useful, it had to be built in not more than four days. So, I got up, and called all the 3MCDO engineers for a meeting. At the end of it, we all went to work. Whoever was

going to talk me out of it was in trouble. I then assigned responsibilities immediately.

We needed several forms of transportation to carry various other items, especially the hot meals, which were very necessary in the rainy, wet weather. There was no gas, no electricity no kerosene or even dry wood for cooking! We needed to address these challenges before and during the 480 kilometres march from Calabar to Port Harcourt.

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We built two pontoons. Together with the government ferry and the dug-out canoes we moved 35,000 troops over Opobo River, with bulk of food of gari, rice, beans, yams, equipment, all heavy weapons including artillery pieces and panhards. All crossed within four days, working day and night. The infantry had earlier crossed with the swimmers, the snipers, and the forward artillery observers. The bridgehead on the west side of Opobo Paver was also successful, and the advance continued as planned without any loss of time and space. The engineers took their time. All those concerned including the records of all items used, were made available for the formal handover of the pontoon to me. We just did not have the drums and music to roll out, otherwise, we would have celebrated. I felt good, and so did all the troops.

Although the rains came with thunder and lightning, as mentioned earlier, we turned that into our advantage.

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Biafran troops had the habit of running into nearby buildings when it was raining and our artillery forward observation officers targeted such buildings for artillery fire. Food and radio communication were important. The rains

came in torrential volumes and thunder was like artillery fire and bombing. We, therefore, put down barrages of artillery volley when it was raining and thundering. This would flush them out of buildings where they had sought shelter from the rain. Most of our movements took place when it was raining in the day and at night.

Cpts. Okwarobor and Sedenu, these fantastic artillery officers were always with the point units, advancing to Port Harcourt, and directing artillery fire. When it was calmer, noise, sneezing and coughing - all tended to give away our positions.

However, snakes were our major problem. They were everywhere, big and long, to shoot them also meant that we were giving away our positions. On several occasions, we were at a loss what to do. All rivers overflowed their banks, as tributaries became big rivers making crossing extra difficult. We had only dug-out canoes, and no paddles. The temperature was cool both in the night and day when it was raining. However, when the rains stopped, the atmosphere was hot and humid. The humidity was about 90% if not more.

Clothes got wet and dried on us as there was no change of clothing, particularly socks. Most of us had blisters on our feet. Supplies reaching the front units became more difficult, so was cooking - because the wood we depended on was wet most of the time. We lived off the land by eating local fruits like mangoes, oranges, pine apples, raw cassava and even drank palm-wine. Of course troops were less thirsty because rain water was good enough for drinking. However, we had pressing need to change clothing and boots. I had blisters on both feet and so did many of the troops. When they showed me theirs, I showed them mine. Without saying any more, the soldiers knew we were in it

together. Sometimes, we hugged each other, sometimes I just patted them on the back and urged them on, but advance we must. Morale was high. But on several occasions, some rifles failed to fire because they were wet.

In 3MCDO, fuel to power our vehicles was difficult to come by, while in other divisions of the Nigerian Army, these items were taken for granted. Whenever the officers requested for them, they got them. I had a stint as Quartermaster General of 1st Division at Enugu at the tail end of the war. It was a luxury to fight in that sector.

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I danced *cha cha* steps with Lt. Col. Tony Hananiya at Enugu during the Christmas party in 1969 while 3MCDO was advancing to execute Operation Pincer 2. All supplies, like petrol, oil and lubricants including meat for their food came from all over Nigeria by road or rail or even by air to these other divisions. 1 Division even had Officers' Mess. In 3MCDO, there was no ambulance. Paramedics found it difficult to move wounded troops, especially those shot in the stomach or with broken legs or even those bitten by snakes. Even if we had provided first aid training for every soldier, in a situation where a wounded soldier needed to be evacuated, at least two other soldiers would have been required to move him. That was hard on 3MCDO which was short of fighting men and always in a hurry. 1 Division took its time.

But in spite of everything, we improvised stretchers with bamboo, bed sheets, and broken doors. The situation was very bad. Some soldiers had to remove their shirts and trousers also for use as stretchers. The humidity at about 90% was good when it rained but then there were insects and mosquitoes, which feasted on our bodies. It was hell on earth. At one point, Adekunle removed his shirt to be used as stretcher during our advance to Ikot Okpora before the Port Harcourt advance. The soldier that Adekunle did this for cried and swore to come back and fight again. He kept his promise.

It was not soldiers alone that were affected, civilians also suffered. Hospital facilities had collapsed to the extent that even an ordinary toothache could end up killing someone.

Those who built the Pontoon

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Difficulties in 3MCDO were obvious, but unfortunately it was difficult for Nigerians to appreciate them, including some military men in Lagos, like Col. Oluleye who sent barbed wires by sea plane to Akinrinade at Bonny when he cried for help at the height of an enemy counter-attack. Eventually, with the collaboration of Lt. Col. I.D. Bissalla, one company from the federal guards was shipped in by J.N. Garba, then Captain, without Gowon's knowledge. 3MCDO had no formal military hospitals in our area of operation, while the other two divisions of the Nigerian Army had military and university teaching hospitals in Lagos, Ibadan and Kaduna.

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Oluleye might have been reading books about World War I. He and others appeared not to have grasped the real situation on ground. We had no armoured tanks and the only panhard scout car we had was of no use for fighting in the mangrove forest. It was road bound and easy target for ambush by Biafra's home-made bombs called *Ogbunigwe*. Certainly our endurance was tested to the limit.

We suffered sleepless nights, restless days and blistered feet and we could not have our baths from April 17th until we got to Opobo River on D+10, which was April 27th 1968. I just had to push the men so hard to enable us achieve results, and since I was there with them and we were victorious, morale was sky high. At some points, we were running instead of walking. We had 20 days to go and Opobo River to cross, with about 35,000 troops.

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Terrain challenges to 3MCDO and Biafrans

The mangrove swamp forest provided cover for the Biafran troops and we had little or no way of seeing them. Our visibility was occasionally zero and we were ambushed by the Biafran troops at will. With a burst of machine gun fire we would have two to three of our troops wounded or even dead. However, this enabled us to locate their positions, and our enveloping troops moved in immediately. There was the stench of death everywhere, with bodies floating in the rivers. The operations of our special forces were most helpful. They were operating behind enemy lines and they did a good job of it. The Biafrans had no answer for them and could not hold out, despite the fact that they had some terrain and home advantage and also knew the routes.

One must, however, be honest enough to admit that these terrain-imposed challenges equally affected us and the Biafrans adversely. I recall an incident at Okrika and Onne sectors occasioned by the alternating low and high tides.

The Biafrans who withdrew from Onne when we enveloped them, ran into the deep mud and marshy land at low tide.

Then the high tide came between 6.00a.m. and 10.00a.m. Akinrinade and I watched the river begin to rise. Gradually, it covered their knees, then rose to their waist, and inched up to their chest, then their mouth and finally covered them all up. They were in quicksand. The more they struggled to get out, the deeper they sank. We didn't have to fire a bullet and it was no use either to think of helping them. The scene was pathetic. We just watched them drown.

As part of Biafra's ingenuity, they had made a lethal weapon called '*Ogbunigwe*' (locally made land mines) which was blowing up the feet of our troops and on direct contact, blew some soldiers into small pieces of meat. They were difficult to find or even to identify. Ogbunigwes were not marked and we had no mine sweepers. It was a lethal barrier on our way! The enemy was on the other side of the mines and were covered by fire. The way 3MCDO troops were spread out reduced the effect of the mines on the troops but took its toll on civilians - especially the farmers that we encouraged to go back to their farms or women at market places.

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Audu Jalingo, six footer plus, a fantastic officer and veteran of the Congo operation lost both legs some two metres from Major S.S. Tomoye, when he was hit by this lethal Biafran weapon. Many of the 3MCDO ladies got killed by this weapon while they were fetching firewood for cooking or water for troops on the move. In spite of the difficulties, we persisted. There was a lot of rain from April to May 1968. But we had to fetch firewood all the same to get the hot meal ready for 5.00 p.m., our usual meal time.

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I thought that I would break, but I only bent and that was not for long. I pushed everybody hard because we had to capture Port Harcourt in 30 days. I remember telling Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo at Ndiya junction, about midway between Oron and Opobo, that we had to make Opobo that night to gain some time as we were in pursuit of Biafran troops to avoid them reorganising on our side of Opobo River. He told me that he thought so too and that his point units were already at Opobo. Instead of having their meal at 5.00p.m., they just continued to the river and special forces led by Isaac Boro and Aliyu had captured the ferry intact, so, the Biafrans had to swim or drown in the river. There was no other way to cross the river. Biafran casualties were heavy. There were dead bodies everywhere, and many bodies floated in the blood soaked river. With that achievement, we gained two days. So, instead of capturing Opobo on D+12=29th April, as planned, we took Opobo on D+10= April, 27th 1968. I think it was providence and destiny that kept us going.

In my appraisal of the situation during the 30 days' advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt, I noted the following points that may militate against the attainment of 3MCDO's aim of capturing Port Harcourt before the Kampala conference in Uganda scheduled for May 30th, 1968. We had thought in advance of the rains, the numerous rivers with bridges and culverts that could have been blown up by the enemy. We made provision for dealing with the swamps and the rivers overflowing their banks at that time of the year, which was the rainy season, as the area is below sea level. We had planned for all these and also adjusted our positions as we moved on. The plan was flexible enough to accommodate unforeseen problems.

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However, our advance was somewhat delayed because the Biafrans were blowing up bridges and culverts. We had intelligence report that ferries were being used at Opobo for crossing the river. These were findings from our patrols, the fishermen, and the 3MCDO ladies 'recce.' The maps available also confirmed same. We were, therefore, determined to capture all of them intact to enable us ferry our vehicles and supplies rapidly to meet up with the pace of advancing 3MCDO troops. These were some of the main reasons for the formation of the three special forces, to operate behind enemy lines to prevent the blowing up of these facilities including the bridges and culverts. At any point where we were in contact with the Biafran troops, the forward units were to get down quickly and return fire while the special forces would enter the bush left and right of the road to engage them from the flanks and from the rear. With these tactics, we had few casualties all the way to Port Harcourt. We also built bridges for the natives as well, for which they were most grateful.

We even had time to open the civilian bridges with some military fanfare except that we had no band to play military music. As previously noted, the main advancing troops of 3MCDO were road bound. Left and right of the road were marshy and swampy with visibility less than a meter in front of us. The government ferry was small and unable to carry more than two Land Rover jeeps and one lorry at a time with 60 minutes turnaround time. It was slow but helpful.

That was why I had to arrange quickly to build a pontoon. I had read about something similar in a military history book about Alexander the Great who built a causeway to fight the enemy on the other side of the river, (From Sidon to capture Tyre Island in 332BC), and he was not an engineer. So, if he could do it, why couldn't we? We needed a pontoon large enough to get the reinforcements and supplies up to the

advancing troops quickly and to be able to evacuate our casualties to the improvised hospital at Etinan, according to the plan. But since we were at Opobo already, having gained two days, Dr Nya, (our wonderful chief medical officer) had adjusted the plan even before I said so. He moved the hospital forward to Opobo.

So, I called the engineers, Majors Kola Onadeko, Oladejobi, Captain Duke, and our dearest brother and friend, the most energetic Captain Olajire, and told them the story of Alexander the Great and his causeway, and asked them to be prepared to build a pontoon large enough for our need in just four days. Fortunately for us, we had already gained two days. For raw materials, Capt. Gagara with four vehicles, and fifteen men and civilians, would fetch empty drums. We were lucky that the people of the area used drums for oil palm business, so we did not have to go far to find them in required quantity, while Capt. Ladipo would fetch the planks, nails and whatever more materials would be needed to achieve results. The pontoon took three days to construct. The natives were very helpful indeed. With all hands on deck, working day and night, the pontoon was ready to 'sail' the fourth day. Before then, however, many other methods had been tried at moving our supplies, ammunition and heavy weapons and vehicles up, but without luck.

Captain Duke, the Doubting Thomas

Captain Duke initially said that the pontoon was not going to work and would be difficult - not that it was impossible. When his argument was too loud for me, I ordered that he be locked up in my tent. However, the pontoon was built and launched the third day and we had gained one day as well. It was very successful until the high tide, when the current was so fast, carried the craft off course down the

river. I was on it with a panhard and Lt. Col. Abubakar who told me that he could not swim. I could not swim more than the length of a swimming pool either. My frequent swimming pool visits in those days were only to look at those in bikini! Luckily, the pontoon swerved to a bank not too far away — about two hundreds metres from the drop zone, and the planned landing site.

Then I realised what Captain Duke was talking about. I went to release him from detention, only to find him fast asleep after drinking my 12 bottles of beer in my tent and drunk. I put all that behind me as the pontoon worked anyway, and we achieved our aim of building it.

Port Harcourt advance organogram

By reading all the maps available, particularly the topography maps, we realised that our major obstacles would be the terrain and the mangrove forest vegetation rather than Biafran fire power which so far, from Calabar to Obubra in the North East, was nothing to write home about.

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We were always enveloping them and in pursuit, so they had little or no time to fire their rifles. Our organogram for the advance was dictated more by these obstacles than what the book said, or by military school training pamphlets. 3MCDO was organised in sections of ten men each, a platoon of 40 men each, a company of 150 men each, a battalion of 500 men each, a brigade of 2000 men each, while the sectors had 7000 men each. We had five sectors for the advance. We had special forces to operate as guerrilla forces in small groups behind enemy lines in small

blobs of not more than a section of ten men, spread over their assigned area of operation.

In order to gain speed as planned, we did not have to be encumbered with heavy loads; we had to travel light but all our supplies, heavy weapons, ammunition and food stuffs must be moved closer at all times. The special forces had more machine guns, grenades and self-propelled grenades, than the other sectors. Their mission was to operate behind enemy lines, to kill, harass and to make them to fire back and give away their positions for the main body to attack. We had to make the enemy fight before they were ready to do so. Specific bridges, culverts and ferries were assigned to be captured intact.

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As noted, most movements were road bound. These roads invariably ended at the bank of the rivers anyway, but the special forces were to have combed the forests left and right of the roads. Should they run into a major trouble, they must hit and run and fire their red flares as sign of a major problem. The Artillery Forward Observation Officers (AFOO) were attached to the special forces to direct fire power more accurately. As arranged also, we had already taken cognisance of the fact that the rains would, as usual in the Niger Delta areas, be torrential with lighting and thunder. The battlefields were turned into ponds in some places when the rivers had overflowed their banks. In the absence of bridges and culverts across these rivers, we had to be organised in small and fast moving independent groups to capture the government ferries shown on the maps, particularly the ones at Opobo. Opobo River was the widest and the biggest river on our way to Port Harcourt.

As we advanced, we had to adjust our positions, leap frog from one section to the other. The 1965 colonial maps were not too accurate but they were our only guide. We had dug-out canoes as our landing craft for carrying troops. The paddlers were all trained by Isaac Adaka Boro at the sea school. The 3MCDO ladies were also organised into groups from the well-known intelligence team to be the interpreters, nurses, and public relations team, guides, food, water and firewood fetchers. There was no kerosene, gas or electricity for cooking; only firewood or nothing. The entire area was wet with the rains and so dry firewood was very difficult to come by. As we advanced, any dry wood found was picked up by these special teams. These facts dictated how we were organised.

At places, we had to build the roads because we had enveloped the Biafran troops by cutting through the jungle, but our supplies hadn't arrived. We did this successfully from Creek Town on the bank of the Cross River to Affia Isong on the bank of Itu River, which cut about 45 kilometres trip to just about 8 kilometres. Our engineers worked hard and did what they were told. Any soldier shot in the swamps had to be evacuated immediately to the forward clinics to avoid tetanus. We already had a lady that died of tetanus at Uyo. In the confusion of war, the tetanus immunisation status of troops was not known before hand.

Teams of paramedics were attached to each advancing troop, particularly the special forces. The canoe paddlers and rescue teams also gathered canoes anywhere they were found and moved forward with the advancing troops, (at risk of enemy fire) otherwise, advancing troops would arrive at points by the river bank (where most roads ended anyway) and they would have to wait for canoes to ferry them across the river. Such delay would have wasted very valuable time. In this dangerous situation, every action had to be

concurrent; there was no time for laxity. Every action was timed, leading to the achievement of our objective in 30 days. It had to be a concurrent activity by all concerned to avoid loss of time. The military policemen and commando ladies were to direct the traffic of male and female refugees. All natives were to go back home as they had no food or medicines at the locations or places that they were moving towards as refugees. They were told that they could not be refugees in their own country. We shared our food with the natives and at some places, they presented us with food. By doing this, there were no starving natives in 3MCDO sector of operation.

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This is the reason why 3MCDO never had a refugee camp even when Aba and Owerri were captured in core Ibo areas by our troops. The officers of 3MCDO used their initiative and were able to achieve results of speed and adaptability unimaginable under the difficult terrain we operated because our organisation was flexible. Every bit of action we took was improvised. We did not depend on or refer to any book. Our organisation was dictated by what was on the ground.

Our troops were broken into independent groups which could operate on their own and made decisions on their own since they were all aware of the main objective. Rendezvous (RV) were clearly marked for food and we assembled the dead and separated them from the wounded.

As previously noted, there was no electricity for mortuary facilities. All these were taken for granted by the other divisions of the Nigerian Army. They were lucky. For 3MCDO,

each unit and subunit had clear missions that fitted into our overall strategy. Logistics were our main problem and we were organised to meet these challenges. Only the five sector commanders reported to me. I would have otherwise had to wait for about 15 brigade commanders to travel across enemy lines, in the mangrove forest, just to brief me, or to make fresh plans in line with unforeseen developments.

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Although we could have used the radio, we realised it could also be compromised by the enemy. So we observed radio silence by all units, until the specified times, and as specified objectives were achieved. Only my radio was open 24 hours but for emergency contacts only and it had to be by the sector commanders alone. I was on the advance too anyway, so to ensure that I was abreast of the situation and read the battle quickly, meetings were short, to the point and were at specific places already earmarked right from the planning stage. It was important to lead from the front, because the troops would be confident to follow. In that way, all officers and men knew that whatever their task, I was capable of doing the same.

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The Battle Plan

The main challenges

The main challenge of the 3MCDO in the Atlantic theatre apart from ammunition and the reinforcement of troops was the logistics. This was so overwhelming that, but for dedicated logistic team of officers like Capts. Akinyanju, Ladipo and Adagboyi, and, of course, the 3MCDO ladies all of whom worked as a team with me, life would have been worse for the advancing troops. The hot meals came at the right time, medicines were made available at the right time, evacuation of casualties was also efficiently done and above all, everybody was accounted for before and after every battle. We had the record of dead, wounded or missing and at what location during the advance. All these would have sapped our morale but for the coordinated teamwork we perfected as we fought and advanced. The vehicles moved, albeit that one was cannibalised for the other, the weapons were repaired immediately, nails were knocked back into broken shoes, stores and bulk breaking points were moved forward to meet with the rate of advance of the troops and the military police under Capt. Richard had their signposts directing people to the rendezvous, meeting areas, toilet, shoe repairs, clinics, and vehicle workshop etc. Our team, could not have been better organised.

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The Logistics Team

The mobile radios arrived ten days before the advance on 7th April. The training of men and the 3MCDO ladies, about how to operate the radios went on for days and nights, under Captain Arinye and the European supplier. Without these radios, command and control would have been very difficult, especially in an unknown terrain, uncharted waters, mangrove forest and swamps and with only the old colonial maps available.

We were also not sure of the loyalty of the natives, since most of them had at one stage or the other been affected by the unrest in the North during the July 1966 counter coup and the killings afterwards. Our situation contrasted dramatically with those of 1 and 2 Divisions, with their HQs initially at Makurdi and Benin City, respectively. Supplies and all logistics were easy; from food supply to reinforcements, evacuation of casualties of the dead or wounded. Even meat and salt in their food were considered normal and taken for granted. They had armoured tanks, and the roads to travel on. In 3MCDO, there was no cow to slaughter for the troops. Even if we had one to kill, how would we have preserved whatever was available and perishable? Life was very difficult for our troops.

If a wounded soldier was not evacuated on time, others would think that the same fate would befall them. This would have caused morale to dip and words would also have gone round faster than feet. We had two special teams of men and women for each unit operating independently during the advance for medical evacuation work, The Medevac Team. They were ladies mainly, with few men to help in the immediate evacuation of the dead and wounded to the rear. A team was responsible for the wounded and sick, while the other was responsible for the dead only.

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My visit to hospitals

I visited the forward hospital twice daily. Once before a major attack and once after. This was a compulsory routine for me. The troops were very pleased with it. I also needed troops to guard the hospitals and rear installations. The discussions with the wounded were always about their family where they were, their home towns, sometimes I knew someone in such towns and the conversations became more friendly, and we discussed the progress so far with the advancing troops, where we had captured and where next to capture.

We got the padres of Mallams and Reverend Fathers to visit twice daily at different times. With that, the wounded troops knew that they were not abandoned, and they saw the dead properly buried as well. Each Mallam and Reverend Father's visit must last at least an hour. My visit and those of various commanders at each level was limited to about 30 minutes, especially after every attack.

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3MCDO ladies

We were functionally organised. We also had teams of ladies and male record keepers who kept records before and after an attack. The records were very comprehensive indeed. It included but were not limited to names, families, hometowns, addresses if any, next of kin, names of children and ages, and if they had messages for their loved ones, which many sent. All these were reconfirmed with master copies of records in the 3MCDO archives. The postal team of commando ladies, under Capt. Arinye had kit bags full of mails daily which were delivered to the pilots of supply flights at Calabar for mailing in Lagos to their recipients. The next of kin was very important for contact and particularly for salary allotments where and when necessary, including Noticas.

So invaluable and inestimable was the work of these women we recruited at Calabar that the success of their operations encouraged us to recruit more ladies everywhere we went on the mainland of Uyo, Eket, Abak, Oron, Opobo, Etinan and at Ikot Ekpene. They kept good records, and were very loyal. Keeping good records kept me alive today. I needed more than anything else, the records of the dead, only to get back home at the end of the war to see a country that did not care about their dead. Nobody cared to know where their loved ones or parents died in the war, or even where they were buried. At Ohoba, Col. Obasanjo, on his first order for attack lost more than a battalion of over 500 men and nobody cared to know how and why. It really was astonishing that in an area of the country where the word 'soldier' was associated with the lower class and in some cases where soldiers had not even been seen before, that families could allow their daughters to work with us, was one of the high points of 3MCDO's success during the war. That they also joined the army was a major factor in our

victory. These ladies were most helpful. They did their work honestly, sincerely and with lots of love. They fetched firewood for cooking, especially, in swampy areas where it rained daily, and there was hardly any dry wood for cooking easily found anywhere. These ladies went out day and night, even in the rains to achieve results. They cooked the meals for the troops, although we ate most of our meals without salt and meat. They were the mothers, they were the interpreters, informers, intelligence gathering team, the nurses, the doctors, the escorts, the guides, the guards, the messengers, the radio operators, the cooks, stewards, ambulance drivers and ammunition carriers. They assisted some soldiers who could not read and write to write their letters and read replies also for them. They cleaned, they repaired, they smiled, they cried, they carried the wounded and the dead and were there at every burial ground. They kept the records of the dying, the wounded and the dead, they helped mail letters to families and when replies arrived, with smiles these letters were delivered to their owners.

We cannot be grateful enough to those women. Even when they were undergoing training with men, they proved more than equal to the task. I salute the ladies, their families and friends and all the people of present day Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Bayelsa states and all those who laid down their lives to keep Nigeria one. Regrettably today, many of these women are in wheel chairs. It is an irony of fate we are forced to live with. We cannot leave out even those who, by just waving at the advancing troops, made our operations a success. These were strong, loyal and brave people indeed.

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Maintaining order in civil society

To keep civil society in order, Justice Ntia of Uyo set up the courts and arranged civil defence. Anything we wanted was made available. He was my civilian liaison with the people. A well respected and respectable person, he stood by the federal troops through thick and thin. Others who helped to organise liberated territories included: Mrs. Henshaw of Itiaba at Calabar, whose house we turned to my war office at Calabar; Howard and Edwa Jay of the Elder Dempster Lines at Calabar, the Ekpeyong family, Justice Udo Udoma, Police Inspector-General Louis Edet, Chief Ogbu — later our representative at the United Nations, Mrs. Comfort Affia of Abak, whose husband Hon. Affia was killed at Abak but she, notwithstanding, kept on supporting the federal troops in many ways.

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We had the Utuk brothers at Uyo; these were transporters, who did not hold it against us that the 3MCDO commandeered all their vehicles for military operations. Miss Afi Ekong, the renowned artist, came to the war front from Lagos to tell her people to support federal troops. She organised the women and the vigilantes. Admiral Akinwale Wey and Cecilia Ekpeyong — who later became Deputy

Governor of Cross River State, were most helpful in organising the rear for us. Sir Victor Uwaifo from Benin City, a Benin City-based musician and entertainer also came to entertain the troops at the Port Harcourt victory party. These are a few amongst the numerous people whose help and support at the rear gave impetus to our troops advancing forward without looking backward. It would have been a lot tougher without them.

More than 40 years after the war, I still remember the names of many of these people. Though I have forgotten some names, I have the pictures. How can I ever forget all those who made it possible for me and the federal troops not only to survive but also to achieve success in a most difficult and unknown terrain against all odds? Without the contributions and efforts of these people, most of us would have been buried in unmarked graves across the area. We cannot thank them enough.

Visitors to 3MCDO

The following set of pictures celebrate those who stood by us throughout the difficult operations of the 3MCDO in the South Atlantic theatre of the Biafran war.

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Contrasting 3MCDO situation with other divisions

In order to understand the situation a little better, you will need to contrast our circumstances with what obtained at 1 and 2 Divisions in Enugu, Makurdi, Kaduna, Benin, Asaba and Onitsha. They had airports, reasonable road networks, hospitals and mortuary facilities, and even rail links which made their movements almost a luxury compared to that of the 3MCDO. Our colleagues in the 1 and 2 Divisions had all means of transportation available to evacuate the dead or wounded, especially by road. Some troops in the 1 and 2 Divisions had off days and relief duties. For instance, Lt. Cols. T. Danjuma and Martin Adamu interchanged at will as staff officers of 1 Division at the war front at Enugu and rear commander at Kaduna which meant that any one of them could have a rest and return to the war front as the case might be. That was a brilliant arrangement by Col. Shuwa, the divisional commander for his officers and men. For our part, we were constantly on the move doing almost impossible things like capturing Obubra in the same process as we were on a relentless 30-day march to capture Port Harcourt! 3MCDO troops had little or no sleep, and no baths for many days and were never sure of the day's meal. Lt. Cols. Danjuma and Adamu were classmates of Akinrinade and myself. Both of them were to Col. Shuwa what we were to Adekunle.

We were constantly on the move. It was either 30 days from Calabar to Obubra and another 30 days from Calabar to Port Harcourt. What a life! When I was transferred to 1 Division as Quartermaster-General just before the end of the war in 1969, I visited my family in Lagos twice in 21 days, which I did not do in two years of restless days and sleepless nights. I rested and slept well for once since 1967. I even had a dream for the first time in two years. My wife became pregnant and we had a baby boy on January 15th, the day that the civil war officially ended. What I am trying to explain here was the ease of life in all other sectors except the 3MCDO. For you to get to Lagos or home or off duty from 3MCDO operation areas of Calabar, Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Opobo, Etinan, Bori, Aletu-Elеме, Okrika or even from Port Harcourt, you had to be dead or seriously wounded.

You must also have died in a town where vehicles were available and probably a flight came in immediately that brought ammunition and was going back right away. The airport was at Calabar, and from the nearest part of our operation area to Calabar was a journey that took a minimum of four hours to the airport, in a humidity of over 90 per cent.

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There was no mortuary, no electricity and only make-shift coffins, if one's body was found at all. All efforts were made to keep records of all our troops in the war front, and we tried as much as possible to avoid what we called, "The Unknown Soldier," in the military.

In the infantry, we were taught to check the troops before and after each battle. We also had records and details of their next of kin.

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Part Two

**3MCDO TROOPS ADVANCE
Calabar to Port Harcourt
April 17th to May 18th, 1968**

Chapter Eight

The 30 Days March to Port Harcourt

The Strategy and Tactics

The reasons for 3MCDO moves during the 30 days' advance to Port Harcourt were founded mainly on our appreciation of the situation, for being original, logical, and objective and for being based on facts and figures on ground. We knew that the officers of the Biafran Army were our seniors and that they knew and understood military tactics and strategy better than we did, particularly better than myself. But then it became my responsibility to lead troops to Port Harcourt, in 30 days from Calabar and against these fine officers that I had grown up in the army to respect. It was, therefore, important for our officers and men to understand why certain moves were made as opposed to the numerous alternatives available, in an attempt to achieve the same aim.

In this move, certain facts were necessary to be considered in detail, especially when other facts were not negotiable. For instance, the 30-day advance to capture Port Harcourt was not negotiable, so were the facts that Calabar to Port Harcourt is a 480 kilometres journey that must be made on foot, across enemy lines, fighting for every inch of the ground, in an area that the Biafrans knew better than us. Again, we were advancing with over 40,000 troops, male and female that must be fed and might be medically attended to. These were facts that could not be changed even if we wanted to. We had to look at every detail of our advance and make provision for all envisaged challenges and problems from start to finish. As an infantry unit, we knew that the replacement of shoes or repair of soles that

would wear down during the 30-day march had to be provided for. Hammers and nails were needed to fix broken shoes, since we 207 had few vehicles for this operation. We took into account the limitations we would have, because of distance, and with limited naval and air support. We could not have air support beyond Oron/Uyo in the north from Calabar. Also stretching west from Oron to Eket, naval support was no longer possible after the Oron landing. So, to save us a lot of discomfort and mitigate our disadvantages, we planned to capture and commandeer vehicles to accelerate our advance and gain time. This was why we thought it unwise to destroy captured Biafran vehicles during the planned ambush and envelopment operations, as the Biafran troops did with Nigerian vehicles at Abagana. With this plan in mind, we started to train drivers and taught them how to connect wires to start a vehicle should the ignition key be lost or not available. Adekunle observed the training and said it was good.

We knew about and planned in advance for the wet season, which would be one of our major obstacles. Apart from its capacity to slow us down, it could hinder our efforts to feed the troops. We knew there was no gas nor kerosene to cook our food with, and that the only fuel source available, which was firewood, would be wet. So we had a team of 3MCDO girls, and some men, who would take care of collecting, preserving and making available firewood for cooking our meals. We had to feed, and that was not negotiable. Also the meals had to be ready on time, so there was a plan in place to ensure same. We also made plans for and trained a Medical Evacuation Team that removed the dead and wounded soldiers separately to prevent morale from going down. So no soldier was allowed to stop advancing to help a colleague that went down in action. We made sure that no matter how simple, every aspect of our lives that would

have made fighting unattractive or difficult was taken care of.

For efficient coordination of these plans, all the officers were made to understand the underlying strategy first before the tactics. Each strategy applied was tailored to the specific situation. For instance, after the Oron landing, our advance into Annang mainland was characterised by a 'strategy of attrition' because we had to reduce the numerical strength of the enemy drastically to enable us achieve rapid movement to expand the bridgehead after landing. This was to avoid being thrown back into the sea as the Biafrans threw 2 Division back into the Niger River at Asaba. After we achieved that, we adopted a 'manoeuvre strategy' to proceed. To avoid costly mistakes and to further confuse the Biafrans, we applied many deceptive tactics. From different directions, we appeared behind them, far away from their fortified positions like at Oron, where we advanced through places they thought were impregnable. The situation was similar at Widenham Creek, west of James Town and when we were climbing Oban Hills and Uwet Valley from Iwuru to Obubra.

We also confused them about our intentions like in the situation at Bonny, where the Biafran troops thought that we were advancing through Onne to capture Port Harcourt, a mere 80 kilometres trip, whereas we came on a 480 kilometre route from Calabar. We got them to chase us in circles, which prevented them from seeing our troops until we appeared behind them, like at Azumini where we captured a whole Biafran battalion of 300 intact. It was the same thing at Uyo where we captured 29 of their vehicles to facilitate our advance to Port Harcourt and while at Owerri, Operation Pincer² kept them guessing and waiting for 3MCDO troops to recapture Owerri frontally from Ohoba, which had been the usual conventional tactics applied all

along by Col. Obasanjo-led 3MCDO, while Uli-Ihiala, their 'centre of gravity' (as conceptualised by Prussian General Carl Von Clausewitz) was captured behind them by Akinrinade, which ended the war. We, therefore, had to apply all the weapons, the strategy, the tactics, and the forces available to us to achieve results. We had the air force, the navy and the infantry. All were massed and applied in varying degrees against the Biafrans at Oron beach landing, and it worked. It was the first of its kind in all battles in Africa south of the Sahara, where the army, the navy, and the air force were engaged in battle at the same time in an African war setting.

The Nigerian Navy

The navy, with two ships, started shelling from D-3= April 14th until the landing on D-Day= April 17th 1968. This was to trick the Biafrans to divert their attention to Oron while Isaac Boro moved into James Town. The three days of naval shelling and bombardment were very successful indeed. But during the landing at Oron, our troops missed the landing site, and landed at Parrot Island near Oron, at night. You can imagine the chaos. The firing and bombing from the naval guns provided the lights, including the lightning from the rain. Most of our troops that were experiencing sea landing operations for the first time, did not find it funny. But Akinrinade, who had come all the way from Bonny Island to help with the landing effort, gathered the troops under naval fire back into their boats to continue the landing exercise. Doing that with troops at night was something else.

We also did not have the proper radio link with the navy during the first wave of the landing because the forward radio was dropped by the operator into the river, so Akinrinade had to go up and down in a speed boat to link up

with the navy, and ordered them not to stop firing as the timing and duration of firing had previously been set. With the loss of time caused by landing at Parrot Island, which was a wrong site, we had to increase the firing time by the navy. We had anticipated all these mishaps to some extent, as we had doubled all signals, communications, commanders and firing and bombing schedules because we had also arranged for a Red Verrey Light Signal to be fired from a pistol, if the naval shelling was landing too close to our troops. But the verrey light signal pistol failed to fire because it was wet. However, the second mobile radio was called forward to remain with Akinrinade for command and control, and to be able to order the naval fire on to the right targets away from the beachhead, to enable our troops land at the correct Oron landing site. The delay at Parrot Island turned out to be fortuitous and to our advantage, as it was already first light, (6.00a.m.) and the rains had stopped at about 4.00 a.m.

That was time for the air force to come into action at first light, and for Isaac Boro to intensify shelling and bombing with his 2-inch and 81mm mortars. All these were also to further divert the Biafran troops attention to his side at James Town away from the landing troops at Oron. The co-ordination of fire power worked just fine. The navy then stopped shelling as they were out of safety range for our landing troops. The experience whereby a soldier came under fire with his friend by his side and the friend was shot, but he could not do anything about it, only to leave him behind on the orders of a superior officer, was the fire baptism for these newly recruited troops. It hardened them thereafter. They became aware that war was a serious and dangerous business and as we say in Nigeria/'khaki no be leather". At Oron, we were fighting the battle of our lives, as there was no other way but to fight and move forward. The officers had to shout for the troops to get their feet off the

boat, and get them on the firm ground, or get killed or drowned. The choice was theirs alone. At that stage, it was no more a training exercise, it was the real thing.

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The plan for Oron landing was a modified version of the one by General George Patton of the US Army in 1943 when landing with his 7th Army Group in Sicily on three fronts — at Licata to the west, Gela in the centre, and Scoglitti to the east, supported by the navy and paratroopers. Isaac Boro's brigade was to the west at James Town, Ayo Ariyo spearheaded the attack in the centre at Oron, while Philemon Shande's brigade landed to the east of Oron at Okopedi. Again, like General Patton who planned an ambush to the north of Gela, we also did the same at Uyo to the north of Oron. The entire plan of the landing at Oron and the ambush at Uyo were very successful indeed; all supported by the navy and air force. The three services of the army, navy and air force were in a successful joint operation in an amphibious landing on Biafran mainland on April 17th, 1968.

Onward to Port Harcourt: The battle for Oron

Our troops' rendezvous at Calabar for the landing started from the Elder Dempster jetty at 9.00p.m., under cover of darkness on the night of 16th April 1968, while it was raining. It was a nine-hour trip, up until the cool dawn of the early morning rising sun at 6.00a.m., of April 17th 1968 to

Oron from Calabar. By 6.00a.m. all hell was let loose as the navy started with rapid covering fire, signalling the troops to land and for Isaac Boro to advance eastwards to draw enemy fire, and for the ambush troops to be in position at Uyo. The plan was perfect to the minute. The battle for the town was won with the joint operational battle plan of the navy, the air force, and the infantry. With our feet finally on the ground, we rapidly expanded the beachhead and, fortunately, the rain also stopped at the right time for the air force to start its operations. The battle for Oron was over. The Biafrans would have to make their new stand for battle elsewhere. That phase of battle for the advance to Port Harcourt was over and over indeed. It was the real beginning of the end of Biafra. We were on the mainland, with our feet on the ground and we had planned for pursuit thereafter. We kept our fingers crossed as the strategy here was 'Blitzkrieg' — to advance with speed, with massed force relentlessly, and from all sides as planned, and to give them no room to reorganise. It was pursuit all day and night, with the battalions of each brigade leapfrogging all the way to Opobo River.

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The Germans used blitzkrieg strategy to effect during the breakthrough at Sedan; General McArthur also used this strategy after his Inchon landing during the Korean war, while in 1991, General Norman Schwarzkopf of the US Army also used this strategy in his 'Hail Mary' plan against Saddam Hussein's guards during Operation Desert Storm. To do this, with over 35,000 troops, in a very fast operation across a distance of 480 kilometres, we had to travel light, as every second counted. We kept reminding ourselves that we had only 30 days to achieve results. The plan had to be made to the last details which were worked out by subordinate commanders that were assigned to perform

specific tasks. No detail was too small to be left to chance. Troops were usually very vulnerable during the landing aspect of a sea-landing operation, the failure of which could have resulted in over 35,000 3MCDO troops dead or captured. We were the more cautious because we already knew that Biafran troops hardly captured prisoners; they just cut off their heads and paraded them in public. They did it at Port Harcourt after winning Onne battle against Akinrinade's 15 Brigade.

image

The Nigerian Air Force

All the landing exercises and plans had been practised, rehearsed and coordinated in detail. Everybody knew what to do. However, in the heat of battle many things went wrong, as we had expected they would, but we had contingency plans, not one, not two, but three were planned for. For instance, we had doubled all plans, including signal methods, and landing sites, should one site be too marshy for landing. Even the methods of expanding the beachhead were varied as there was inadequate information and intelligence reports on the landing sites.

The luck we had was the mistake of initially landing on the wrong site on Parrot Island, which allowed the air force to meet us at first light, at the height of our trouble and chaos. So, it was first light, and while we were still milling around disorganised, the air force came in at exactly 6.30a.m., and started strafing and bombing north towards Uyo and west towards Opobo. 3MCDO had the support of three MiG Russian-built jet fighters, taking off from Calabar airport. We had practised what we called 'leapfrogging' tactics with the three jet fighters. Calabar to Oron turn around including rearming and refueling for the jet fighters was only 15

minutes. What I wanted actually was for the Biafrans to believe that we had more than three fighter jets. That is, the three jet fighters would take off at the same time from Calabar airport, one to the north and one to the west, while the third would operate within the beachhead area, then one would go back to reload and return to continue bombing and strafing after five minutes of operation, leaving the other two to continue operating and the others will repeat and continue the same operation.

The leapfrogging tactics were possible because of the short turnaround time from Calabar to the target area by the air force and the fact that we had practised the refueling and the rearming exercise to last not more than 20 minutes but we had achieved 15 minutes already as anything more would jeopardise the leapfrogging plan. The jet fighters were in the air for over three hours, while the air force ground crew were simply wonderful. They did not miss any of the drills. The Biafrans were running around uncontrollably in every direction. A week before then, we had practised these moves practically, with Ayo Ariyo inside one of the jet fighters operating to the west on strafing, bombing and 'recce' missions, while Adekunle was inside a second one on the same mission to the north, and I was on the same mission with Capt. Gbadamosi King as the pilot in the third jet fighter to the east towards Itu, Ikot-Ekpene, to Uyo and back through Oron to Calabar. I was the last to return to base. When we landed, my eyes were turning round and round, so much so that I found it difficult to stand on my feet. I lay down on the tarmac for about five minutes with everybody laughing at me. I did not know that they had gone through that experience already. This is what the air force called "GEE". Well, I did not like it, and I have not pulled any GEEs since. I like to be infantry with my feet on the ground, but it was a great experience that I will not forget. So, the leapfrogging tactics with the air force worked.

From then on, they pounded, bombed and strafed, in order to soften the targets. We gained the initiative, we had air superiority and air supremacy of the battle area and we gave it all we had. That was 'Martial Strategy' in short.

The Infantry (3MCDO)

We went on patrol by clingy boats with Isaac Boro through James Town across the Widenham Creek to Ibono, south-west of Oron, the selected main landing site. The Biafrans had thought it was impassable, and did not deploy enough troops to the area. With little extra effort and training on how to operate in the creeks and marshy areas from Isaac Boro, we made the impossible easy. On D-3 day, which was 14th of April 1968, three days to the main landing operation, we infiltrated the entire 19 Brigade into Ibono before daybreak the first day and then subsequently, their equipment and their two-inch mortars and 81mm mortars, since heavy weapons were too difficult to advance within that terrain.

We diverted Biafran attention away from their dug-in positions at Oron to the Widenham Creek, to their right, where they fought Isaac Boro's diversionary special forces for three days, and thought that our advance was from there, but they were wrong. On the third day April 17th, 1968, which was the D-Day we landed at Oron beach supported by the navy and air force, with less resistance than it would have been. So, we displaced them from their vantage, well defended points, because they couldn't read our intentions correctly. We sent them in the wrong direction at the Widenham Creek, as we seized the initiative and made them fight before they were ready. They ran, and withdrew towards Opobo River, where Isaac Boro was already waiting with a battalion after he had seized the only ferry that they needed to cross Opobo River on their way

back towards Port Harcourt, withdrawing their troops. Those who ran to the north of Oron met Lt. Cols. Ayo Ariyo and Shande waiting at Ekeffe, which we had planned as our crossing point over Opobo River. Adekunle was there to see the landing at Oron; he also saw the crossing at Opobo before returning to Lagos. He was very interested in seeing the swimmers and how the pontoon was deployed. The only escape gap that we left for them was at Azumini.

image

Using ‘Dilemma’ as strategy

The Biafrans could neither go south, nor could they go north. They could not also go forward because we had already expanded the beachhead where we were already in pursuit of their disorganised, withdrawing troops and they could not go back because of Opobo River behind them. Since it was part of Isaac Boro’s orders to capture the ferry intact, he did not waste time in doing just that. So, there was no ferry to cross Opobo River with. Therefore, whichever way they turned, they lost. In the pursuit from Oron to Opobo River, many of the Biafrans threw away their World War I bolt action weapons that they were saddled with, and did not fire a shot while running away. When they got to Opobo River they had to swim or drown. Many did, and in their hundreds. Every option was bad for them because whichever way they took, they were in trouble. That was a ‘Dilemma Strategy’ derived from the Blitzkrieg.

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By 6.00 a.m., after two hours of our crossing Opobo River all night under heavy rains, thunder and lightning, by the swimmers and were ready for the attack, the rains suddenly stopped. The Lord must have approved our operations, as it

was first light when we attacked Biafran locations on the west bank of the river from both sides at Opobo town, to the left by Isaac Boro and to the right by Shande from Ekeffe. They could not believe how we got there said a POW.

I was on the right with Shande because of the importance of his operation, which was the blocking operation at Obigbo, and the fact that he had the whole of his right flank exposed to the Ibo heartland. Biafran troops retreated from their defences on the river banks, and once more their retreat became a pursuit with Ayarba and Bodo to the left, Kibani and Bori to the centre and Akwete to the right. Having occupied the bridgehead on the west bank of Opobo River, the dug-out canoes, the ferry and the two pontoons started to move reinforcements, heavy weapons and supplies forward. In two days, we were all done and ready to advance. Lt. Col. Abubakar was simply wonderful, he was up to the task. So the dilemma strategy worked perfectly once more.

To explain this aspect of the dilemma strategy a little better, the strategy here was that, if I give you a problem, you will solve it and be emboldened thereafter; but if I give you a dilemma, either way you looked or turned, you've had it. I will give the example of cassava planting in Nigeria in 2005. The Obasanjo government spent quite a sizeable amount of money educating and urging Nigerians to plant cassava both for export and for the domestic market. The numerous uses of cassava were outlined and all the advantages were enumerated.

Apart from the known farmers, some civil servants got loans and joined in the crusade and planted cassava. Some ambitious ones even planted maize along with rows of cassava ridges. Then came the time of harvesting. First, was the maize that had to be harvested after six months, then

was the cassava that took nine months to a year for harvesting, or about the same time with the maize. I had warned all my 50 tenant farmers not to join in the venture because from my experience and knowledge of the promoter of the venture, it may end up in a dilemma, because in 1977, something similar was introduced in the country. Nigerians were to buy up the items that foreigners sold in their retail shops, and to try to manage such shops for profit, as it was only a matter of buying and selling which all market women could do, and *did* not require any expertise or training. It was backed-up by a decree titled 'Indigenisation Decree.' It benefitted the Yorubas only. At least so they thought initially because all the shops were in the southern part of the country, while the Ibos had no money as they were still recovering from the war.

Nigerians rushed for it and obtained loans and all that were necessary to achieve results. Some even resigned from their civil service jobs to get into the lucrative job of being shopkeepers. No sooner were these new breed of shopkeepers settled to the nitty gritty of their new trade than the same government banned the importation of the items being sold in those newly acquired shops into Nigeria. Hell was let loose as these items were not produced in the country. The aim though might have been to enable local production of the banned items and move the country forward from shopkeepers to producers as a foundation for industrial base but in all my military training, one was expected to make haste slowly, the Chinese call it 'slow-slow, quick-quick,' based on a sound and forward-looking plan. So, these new Nigerian shopkeepers, who had taken over from the expatriates, had no wares to sell, but they had loans to service plus interest charges. The civil servants who resigned could not go back to their former jobs, nor could they afford to close their shops, as some, if not many, had paid about five years' rent in advance as demanded by the

landlords. Either way, they lost, and so was the situation for the cassava farmers. So, Yoruba middle class were ruined.

Since everybody did the same thing at the same time, there was maize glut and people sold them cheaply and in fact cheaper than the cost of production. However, selling maize was not much of a problem. For the cassava farmers, their situation was worse, as the projected buyers did not show up. There was glut, they could not sell. All the expected financial projections failed, the civil servants whose salaries were not enough to carry them for the normal 30 days in the first place, and who got loans to plant cassava were more in trouble. Most farmers could not service their loans, they could not sell the cassava as there were no buyers. Many could not harvest the cassava from the ground, and they could not keep the cassava in the ground perpetually, neither could they store them scientifically or by local methods as there were no plans made for that. Whichever way they went, they lost. The only farmer from my farm who did not listen to me and planted cassava now knows better. It was a dilemma. This went on for about three years without major buyers and so they lost, not because of unpredictable nature, but because the leadership might not have planned well.

This same dilemma strategy was used against Biafran forces facing Akinrinade at Bonny Island. When Adekunle's maps were stolen in Calabar during the planning stage for the 30-day advance to Port Harcourt, we decided to keep it that way in order to keep the Biafrans guessing and to continue to make them believe that they got the right maps. So Akinrinade was to keep up with the offensive-defensive plan, and keep harassing them day and night, until the main body of our troops advancing from Calabar through Oron got to Opobo before he attacked Onne and started to inch forward as if he would lead the unit to capture Port

Harcourt. That way, the bulk of the Biafran troops with their reserves were tied down facing Bonny with their backs to Port Harcourt.

Well, rightly enough, how could any military strategist or tactician ever believe that troops advancing from 480 kilometres away would come and attack Port Harcourt when there were troops stationed about 80 kilometres to Port Harcourt? The deception worked, they strongly believed that 3MCDO troops would enter Port Harcourt from Bonny front. They were wrong.

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Once again, the Biafrans took the bait. Akinrinade's troops were to make so much noise by shelling with all their artillery and mortar bombs at a rapid rate for three days to enable me move the main body to Aletu Eleme from Bori from May 9th to May 12th, 1968, which was D+22 to D+25, as planned. With Akinrinade's guns firing at rapid rates, there was no doubt left in Biafran minds that the 3MCDO troops attack to capture Port Harcourt would come from Bonny Island. Akinrinade was to advance to Onne and link up with Isaac Boro advancing from James Town. Boro was already at Ayarba and Bodo on his (Akinrinade's) right flank and both were to regroup at Onne and capture Okrika on D+25. The Biafrans took the bait and lined up a major part of their troops to attack Akinrinade at Onne. They (Biafrans) gave a good account of themselves and hit Akinrinade hard. Isaac Boro who was to link up with Akinrinade was two days late. His rear at James Town had been attacked by some Biafran stragglers across the river from Abana in the Bakassi Peninsula.

We had a little setback and with Adekunle on the radio from Lagos ordering that we must attack Onne regardless, and not to wait for Isaac Boro, Akinrinade had to attack Onne with his troops of 15 Brigade alone without Isaac Boro's unit of 19 Brigade, which arrived 48 hours later. I was on my way back from Abana with Isaac Boro when Shande and Aliyu's special forces which were already two days ahead of the main body, were called in from Obigbo and Bori respectively to send troops to relieve Akinrinade of pressure by attacking the Biafrans' rear at Okrika, behind Biafran lines. That was a very good 'alliance strategy' An attack on one is an attack on all. In our training at Calabar before the advance, we had three main points we hoped would see us through. These were notes taken from our military school training, that *firstly*, you must be dependable; *secondly* you must be independent and *thirdly*, your units' activities must be interdependent for the good of the entire formation.

During this operation from Calabar to Port Harcourt, each one must depend on the other for survival, while the officers were the parents, and each one of us his brother's keeper. However, with the training already received, each should be able to operate independently, be self-sufficient, and be able to fight as an independent unit. That was what kept Utuk alive for seven months during his siege at Owerri, and, of course, by the grace of God. *Finally*, whatever happened to one unit happened to all and the problems must be solved together, for the good of all. It reminded me of the motto of my alma mater, Ibadan Boys' High School, which says, "*Domini Opera Pro Bono Publico*," meaning, "The work of the Lord is for the good of all." So, armed with all these, the main body from Calabar having just crossed Opobo River into Bori on D+22, that was May 9th, 1968, had to move to gain two days at the least, based on the new development at Abana and in Akinrinade's sector.



We had to adjust our dates slightly, as we were very flexible to enable us do some adjusting of our positions or tactics when and where necessary. We crossed Opobo from three points into the final phases of the advance into Port Harcourt. It was a three-pronged attack from there on. The *first* was from Isaac Boro, who headed to the west from Opobo town, through Ayarba, Bodo, across Bonny River to cut off Finima along the creeks, and then link up with Akinrinade for the attack on Onne. He was virtually unopposed. The *second* was by Ayo Ariyo, Aliyu, and Eromobor to the centre, through Opobo crossing point, to Kono, Bori and to the rendezvous at Aletu Eleme, while the *third* front was led by Shande, crossing from Ekeffe, to Akwette, to Okoloma and to Obigbo. All the centre troops were to mass and rendezvous at Aletu Eleme for the final assault on Port Harcourt.

Here was the dilemma facing Biafran troops. They tied down their main forces and reserves facing Akinrinade at Onne. They even captured Onne for 48 hours only. They killed all our troops that were captured. Some had their heads severed from their necks and were paraded on the streets of Port Harcourt. They also partied and danced and did not realise that it was prepared as their killing ground before Isaac Boro and I returned from Abana. Thereafter, they saw hell, and when they realised the hopelessness of their positions, they fled. They could not advance, because Akinrinade and Boro were there facing them frontally they could not retreat because Aliyu and Shande's troops were there behind and to make matters worse for them, when they tried to swim across Okrika River, they went into quicksand and many drowned. Some managed to get to Aba road where Shande was in blocking position. They were all mowed down as the only route that we opened for escape

was Owerri road. The dilemma was complete, as anywhere they turned, they lost. As planned, the main battle for Port Harcourt was already fought at Onne and at Okrika. Our entry and capture of Port Harcourt was only a matter of time. In all my plans, I always left an escape route because they could want to fight to finish, causing casualties on both sides. It was better that they ran away rather than being boxed in without a choice. Finally, it was a civil war and not a fight to finish. That way, I had only one officer and eight soldiers dead in the 30-day and 480 kilometres advance with 35,000 troops from Calabar to Port Harcourt and of course Isaac Adaka Boro that was killed at Okrika.

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The final one was the ambush and the 'Envelopment Tactics' which took place at Uyo and Ikot Ekpene to the north of Oron.

The landing site for the beachhead was Oron as planned, which was about 80 kilometres south of Uyo. But as envisaged, we expected the Biafrans to try to repeat what they did brilliantly at Asaba where they threw the troops of 2 Division into River Niger. They would want to throw 3MCDO troops into the sea and into Calabar River at Oron, as their counter-attack plan. We had thought of all these possibilities during strategy debates in Calabar. The ambush and enveloping troops were led by me, with Lt. Cols. Pius Eromobor, Abubakar, Sunny Tuoyo, Majors Ahmadu Aliyu, Utuk, Cpts. Ighodalo and S.S. Tomoye.

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The five-pronged attack

The advance to Port Harcourt from Calabar was a five-pronged exercise. *First*, from Bonny, led by Lt. Col. Alani Akinrinade *second*, from James Town through infiltration into Widenham Creek led by Isaac Adaka Boro; *third*, from Oron through Opobo and Bori, led by Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo; *fourth* from Okopedi, through Ekeffe led by Lt. Col. Philemon Shande, and the *fifth* from Calabar through Itu and Uyo as the ambush and the enveloping troops led by Lt. Col. Alabi-Isama. We advanced from Calabar on D-10, which was on Sunday 7th of April, 1968. The plan was to cut through the mangrove forest across Uwet valley and Oban Hills, appear behind enemy lines at Itu; just as at James Town, where Isaac Boro passed through what was supposed to be an impassable and impregnable marshy creek. He was not expected until he showed up behind them at Oruko and at Oyubi. The same thing happened during our advance to Itu through Creek Town. The advance from Creek Town to Itu was through Oban/Uwet high hills and deep valleys, with thick mangrove vegetation, which were very difficult to navigate.

But it was only difficult, not impossible. Lt. Col. Obeya advanced with his 18 Brigade through the known and expected routes from Calabar through Odukpani, Ndong Nwong, to Obom Itiat into Itu, while the main body led by me, with Eromobor, Sunny Tuoyo, S. S. Tomoye, Ighodalo and Utuk, went through this most difficult Uwet valley and hills. By the time Biafran troops knew it, we had appeared in four places: at Itu, Uyo, Mbia, and Nung Udoe at the same time. So, while Tuoyo's 13 Brigade engaged Biafran troops in battle at Uyo, the ambush and enveloping troops were already in their positions.

The ambush was total and we did not miss anything. It was successful, but the aim was to capture their vehicles. So, we crossed Itu River and advanced to lay ambush for Biafrans whom we anticipated would send heavy reinforcements to Oron with a view to throwing the 3MCDO beachhead troops into the sea, as they did at Asaba to 2 Division troops. We expected that they would send a sizeable number of troops to achieve that, and that they would be in vehicles, and would be on Umuahia, Ikot Ekpene and Uyo roads. We needed the vehicles, not dead troops. The ambush was planned for D+1, which was four days after Boro's landing at James Town, and one day after Ayo Ariyo and Shande's landing at Oron. These moves were well coordinated and designed to make them run

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As we anticipated, the Biafrans came with their reinforcements in many vehicles coming from Umuahia. The Nigerian Air Force with three jet fighters were to simply overfly Oron-Uyo-Ikot Ekpene-Umuahia road, not to bomb or strafe the vehicles, but must look for opportunity targets only on the left side of the road, as the ambush was to the right side of the road. We provided a little gap at Azumuni and to let them slip away. As said earlier the aim was not to kill the Biafrans but to capture their vehicles, and supplies. If we had laid the ambush on both sides of the road, we would have been firing at some of the vehicles. So, as the air force scared them, they ran out of their vehicles into the ambush. The envelopment was complete and successful. We got 26 vehicles, and some *gari* (cassava flour). Five of the vehicles were assigned to Eromobor, the reserve unit that was to move forward after the ambush, while the rest were shared between Capts. Akinyanju of the logistics team, for firewood and hot meals, Gagara and Ladipo for canoes and pontoon materials, and two little buses, one for the

engineers and the second one to the medical team as our ambulance.

With the ambush and envelopment tactics successful, the rest was a nonstop pursuit to Opobo River - the blitzkrieg strategy once again. With full understanding of the strategy and the aim behind it, each commander was told where to go and when to get there, but the tactics on how to get there were left to their initiatives, without interference but under my watchful eyes for command and control. Of course, they would attack opportunity targets as they advanced. Each unit had its complement of supporting arms and services including medical, engineers, commando ladies, radio, and supply and transport (S&T), and could ask for whatever was necessary which were available due to special needs for special areas.

The Plan of Attack....Calabar - Port Harcourt Advance

D.Day = April 17th, 1968

We made sure that we considered all the parameters, which included, but were not limited to all the possibilities that had been considered all along, like the obstacles, the terrain, the logistics, other challenges, including the strategy to be adopted, the assumptions of how the Biafrans would react to any of our moves and tactics, my own shortcomings as a person, since I knew that I did not have the preserve of knowledge on all these points made. In some situations I depended on the knowledge and advice of some of my officers, the orders of my boss, Col. Benjamin Adekunle, and those things that were not negotiable. All our plans were made to ensure the capture of Port Harcourt on May 25th, 1968. Therefore, all plans were objective and realistic. We did not forget to cater for the pen and papers,

on which minor instructions would be written as verbal instructions could be misinterpreted in the heat of battle and could have another meaning or be misconstrued at the other end.

I also realised that I could not pass new instructions to all the troops at the same time, except by radio, which I must use with caution, as the Biafrans might be listening. I must, therefore, cut waste of time and unwanted repetitions. I, therefore, had to streamline the organogram to meet the demands posed by the situation on ground as it existed. We created the main army units as known in the book and within the principles of war and then, the special forces which were the unknown. The blending of the known and the unknown made the 3MCDO special and the Biafrans never thought of it, and therefore, did not know how to react to it when the plans became operational on the battlefield.

Since the Biafran officers and all of us were trained in the same military schools at home and abroad, we could guess fairly correctly how they would react to our actions as we were trained. That was why the debate at Calabar with Adekunle on tactics and strategy became useful.

Sometimes, I was the Biafran commander and he was the opposing Nigerian commander and vice versa. I was, however, particularly afraid of facing Major Chukwuka in battle as we had attended the same military training school at Quetta, Pakistan. As such, I thought that he might read more meaning into my moves than other Biafran officers who trained elsewhere around the world. Fortunately for us, Chukwuka had been incarcerated by Ojukwu as part of the 'saboteur' mania that gripped Biafra after the Midwest debacle. We also thought rightly that Biafran plans would be based on old World War II conventional tactics of attacking and defending, as in the books, and so it was!

Col. Hillary Njoku

One other officer of Biafra that I was so afraid of meeting and fighting against on the battlefield was Col. Hillary Njoku. Brig. Zak Maimalari in late 1965, who was the brigade commander, organised a training exercise titled, 'Operation Belly Ache' at Abeokuta. Col. Njoku was the commander of the 1st Battalion there that was being tested for battle readiness. I was a company commander at the 4th Battalion at Ibadan brought to Abeokuta as the enemy to be captured by the battalion. The exercise took a week and instead of 1st Battalion capturing me, I captured them. While they were expecting me to sit down there in the trenches as written in the military pamphlets, I decided to take the battle to the enemy. The battalion did not expect that to happen and so on the seventh day, I was able to capture Col. Njoku's HQ which ended the war training.

This brought a heated exchange of words between Col. Njoku and Brig. Maimalari, as my method was not normal as written in the military training books, but Brig. Maimalari saw it as an innovation to the training and the training pamphlet, which Brig. Maimalari supported as brilliant but unorthodox. After all, the aim of the exercise was to be battle ready. The point was that when the umpire blew the whistle for the exercise to begin, the battalion deployed around wanting to capture me and my troops while dug-in inside the trenches waiting for the enemy to come, according to military training pamphlets. Instead, I intensified my patrols which made the battalion to think that I was close by. I also sent patrols out to confirm their meal times. So, instead of sitting and waiting for them to come, I went on a wide envelopment trying to capture the battalion HQ instead of them capturing me. So, when the battalion HQ was captured the umpire declared me the winner, as the supplies, ammunition, medicines, food and all documents were

captured while they were having dinner. Throughout the civil war, Biafran troops' deployment and movements were as for WW II and as contained in our military training pamphlets. It was, therefore, easy to imagine how they would behave or react to a particular situation. When we introduced the special forces operation with the known methods, it was difficult for them to counter our moves easily, as they could not predict what would come next. If Col. Njoku were there, perhaps the situation would have been different. Well, that was not to be.

At the end of the training exercise, there was a debriefing and I was ordered to explain how I did it. There was applause from all the officers present and more from Col. Njoku himself who spoke with me at the end of the training exercise. I was a captain and I told him that I appreciated his kind words to me after the debriefing. Everytime we met again thereafter, be it at sports field or training or a conference, he was always kind to me. At times, when he came to Ibadan for senior officers' meeting, he would always ask for me. That was very kind of him indeed for a very senior officer to look for a junior officer by name. Later, after the war training, I was transferred to NMTC (Nigerian Military Training College) at Kaduna as tactics instructor.

As the most senior officer in Biafra, we thought that Col. Njoku would have been their army commander, who would have probably guessed right on how I might move in an attack against Biafran troops positions, as they had intelligence reports on each officer of the Nigerian Army, more so with 3MCDO capturing almost everywhere.

These were also the tactics that we used for the 30 days advance to Obubra and another 30 days to Port Harcourt. 3MCDO was always operating behind their lines. We finally heard that Col. Hillary Njoku was incarcerated in Biafra, just

like Maj. Chukwuka. I jumped for joy. Little did I know that, the very unorthodox tactics that I used to capture 1st Battalion at the war training exercise in 1965 at Abeokuta, would still be relevant and was going to play an integral part in ending the Nigeria-Biafra civil war in 1970.

Unorthodox 3MCDO tactics

While we kept the old military ways of fighting, we not only modified the usual principles of war as known in the books, we added what we called 'special forces', whose main tactics were to operate behind enemy lines like the Chindits in Burma during WW II in 1945, while the usual military fighting methods still took place at the same time for which the Biafrans had no answer. It was like guerilla warfare but a little different. For while guerillas would hit and run, these were to hit to draw enemy fire and capture opportunity targets. The forward artillery officer was part of the team to direct artillery fire. The army engineers were also attached to blow bridges where necessary or disarm a mined bridge or bombs. This was what the team of Isaac Boro did to capture the government ferry at Opobo intact. The special forces also had a swimming team that swam across Opobo River, captured the bridgehead for the main body to be able to cross with dug-out canoes as landing craft for an attack in an opposing river-crossing operation. While the Biafran troops were still facing the river to see where we were to cross the river, we were already behind them, so they fled and the canoes inched forward across the river. One can only imagine the number of dug-out canoes and the time that would have been needed to move about 40,000 troops across Opobo River. We needed to cross the river with bags of gari, rice, beans, other food items, ammunition, bombs, kits, heavy weapons, and vehicles, with two hours turnaround, with one of these canoes carrying only eight

soldiers without kits at a time or six with kits. We just looked at our needs and trained troops for such accordingly. We did not have to complain about what we did not have, we only used our initiative and made the best use of what we had. For the commanders, it was also very important that all of them in the field should understand the strategy very well, so as not to have any doubts left in their minds as to what tactics should be applied or what was expected to be achieved by the division itself based on the overall strategy, and at what time.

Time was important. The various commanders were very brilliant indeed because, after the training, and the overall understanding of the requirements and the AIM in particular, each one added his own initiative and style. I was pleased at the ways the officers and men moved. My supervision was minimal.

The various commanders were expected to be able to come up with the tactics to apply that suited their peculiar area of operation. They should also be able to achieve what was expected of them. For instance, Isaac Boro was operating in the south on the Atlantic coast, an area below sea level, marshy, waterlogged and a mangrove forest with humidity over ninety per cent. It rained almost daily, which further limited his ability to move fast even if he wanted to. Lt. Col. Shande was to operate further north on drier land but dirty roads. But there were roads, culverts and bridges which were already there for use. Though I needed the advice of the commanders, the eventual success of the operation or otherwise rested on Adekunle and I, and I had promised Adekunle that I would be worthy of his trust. Moreover, the entire nation expected success. You needed to have met my mother who had proudly told all her friends at the Ansar-ud-Deen Muslim mosque in Lagos that her son was the deputy to Adekunle, who was known all over the country and the

world at large as the 'Black Scorpion', the champion of the Biafran war. I thus could not afford to disappoint all those who reposed their trust in me, including the over 40,000 troops engaged in this campaign. The map of the battle plan was given to each of the commanders. The plans had been discussed, rehearsed, debated and practised. I had also read books on World War II of General George S. Patton in Sicily, the Battle of the Bulge, and the German Blitzkrieg which I also taught students at NMS and NMTC. Now, it had to be practicalised. Commanders were given their orders by name, rather than by their units. Nothing special about that, it was my method of achieving results.

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Excerpts of Battle Plan and Instructions

1. Isaac Boro's Battle Plan Special Forces (Sector 1)

a. Phase 1 - Land and capture James Town beach and infiltrate Biafra Positions up to Ibono from D - 3.

(i) Operate behind enemy lines at Oron from Etebi, Oruko and to Oyubi.

(ii) Draw the enemy toward you to make them leave their well dug- in trenches at Oron, while Lt. Cols. Ariyo and Shande land at Oron.

(iii) Your battle here will last 5 days to D+2= April 19th.

(iv) Secure the left flank of landing troops.

b. Phase 2 Continue to Ibono, Okoro Ete, Okoro Inyang and Obianga, without fighting at Eket, but must draw their fire. Hold these by D+4= April 21st. Lt. Col. Ariyo will hold your right flank.

c. Phase 3 - Continue to operate behind enemy lines at Kono with your swimming team and capture the government ferry intact at Opobo. No fighting inside Opobo town. However, take opportunity targets, D+10= April 27th.

d. Phase 4 Link up with Lt. Col. Akinrinade's 15 Brigade to take Onne on D+15= May 2nd, 1968.

e. Phase 5 - You and Lt. Col. Akinrinade to capture Okrika not later than D+25= May 12th.

(i) RV with main body at Aletu Eleme on May 14th at 12.00p.m. 12.00p.m.= D+27= May 14th, 1968.

(ii) Both brigades must draw enough fire to make the rebel believe that your two brigades will enter PH. Engage their troops, until (our main body will take their rear at Aletu Eleme same day) D+25= May 12th It is called "Dilemma Strategy". Do not enter Port Harcourt, not even as an opportunity target.

f. Phase 6 - 15th and 19th Brigades, you, and Lt. Col. Akinrinade will be in reserve at Port Harcourt Kingsway until called forward; it could be at a moment's notice. Your next objective will be Ahoada.

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2. Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo - (Sector 2) (Egbon mi— my elder brother)

a. Phase 1 - Land at Oron on D-Day April 17th 1968 at 6.00a.m. Akinrinade will be with you to assist.

(i) Expand your beachhead to Okopedi, Oruko and Etebi. Shande will pass through you at 9.00 a.m. to your right on D-Day April 17th, heading to Obigbo and holding your right flank.

(ii) Isaac Boro will hold your left flank on the Atlantic coast from D-3 landing until D+25= May 12th when we RV at Aletu Eleme, on D+25= May 12th.

b. Phase 2 - Take Eket D+4= April 21st. Isaac will continue to draw their fire for you to operate at their rear up to Opobo. D+12= April 29th. Take opportunity targets as you advance.

c. Phase 3 - Take Opobo not later than D+12.

(i) Ahmadu Aliyu (Special Forces) will join you at Opobo, not later than D+12= April 29th.

(ii) Meeting with you on D+15 at Bori, to review situation so far. Lt. Col. Eromobor will also attend the meeting at 12.00 p.m., May 2nd 1968.

d. Phase 4 - RV at Aletu-Eleme on D+25 at 12.00p.m. = May 12th

e. Phase 5 - Lead us sir into PH on D+31= May 18th 1968, not later than 10.00a.m. Please accompany me to the airport at 14.00p.m. May 18th 1968 to meet the GOC - Col Adekunle. Good luck sir.

image

3. Lt. Col. Philemon Shande (Special Forces)

a. Phase 1 - Land at the right side of Ayo Ariyo on D-Day April 17th at 9.00a.m., and head on to Ekeffe, on Opobo

River, passing through Okopedi, and Etinan while looking after Ayo Ariyo's right flank.

b. Prepare crossing sites for the division not later than 12.00 p.m. D+12= April 29th, 1968. Artillery Unit with Sedenu is attached to you, and 2000 swimmers from Isaac Boro.

c. Phase 2 - Cross your Brigade, take Akwette, and Obigbo, not later than D+22 = May 9th, at 12.00p.m. Hold the bridge at Obigbo in a blocking position against Biafra reinforcement from Aba and against refugee crossing from Port Harcourt to Aba. You may taste fire power from Ibo heartland before any of us. You are not in the final battle into Port Harcourt. No opportunity targets whatsoever. Join me to receive the GOC at the airport at 14.00p.m. D+31= May 18th, 1968.

Good luck, my friend.

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4. Lt. Col. Pius Eromobor (Sector 3)

a. Phase 1 -1 will advance with your sector and with Major Aliyu (special forces) up to Opobo, as the ambush and enveloping force. Advance to Itu through Creek Town, Adiabo, Akpap, Oku Iboku, Obom Itiat and Affia Isong, from D-7= April 10th, 1968.

b. Phase 2 - Cross Itu River to your ambush area at Uyo, not later than 9.00a.m. D-Day= April 17th, for 48 hours up to D+2 = April 19th, at 12.00p.m thereafter to Ekeffe crossing point on Opobo River. Major Aliyu will cross your troops at Ekeffe.

(i) Lt. Col. Obeya's 18 Brigade is point unit into Itu from Calabar, through Odukpani, and Ndong. You are in reserve for the sector, and on call at a moment's notice. Watch

movement from Arochukwu. You will be in position not later than D-3= April 14th, 1968, and cross all units across Itu River.

(ii) Major Tuoyo will be point unit from Itu to Uyo, hold Uyo not later than 9.00a.m. D-Day = April 17th, 1968 and Azumini with 13 Cdo Bde, not later than D+12 = April 29th. Hold right flank for enveloping troops, up to Azumini. Azumini is blocking position for Biafra reinforcement from Aba area, and killing ground. Uyo is blocking position against reinforcement from Umuahia.

c. Phase 3 - As enveloping forces up to Ekeffe crossing point on Opobo River, through Abak, and Utu Etim Ekpo. Major Aliyu will link up with Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo at Ekeffe on D+12 = April 29th, 1968, hold Bori and RV at Aletu Eleme D+25= May 12th, 1968 at 12.00p.m.

d. Phase 4 - RV with me at Aletu Eleme D+25= May 12th, 1968 for final battle into Port Harcourt. Shande is at your right flank while Ayo Ariyo is at your left flank. Good luck.

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5. Lt. Col. Alani Akinrinade. (Sector 5) Battle Plan for Onne and Rivers

a) Phase 1. Hold position at Bonny Island and control no-man's land up to Onne. Please stay with Oron landing forces, to lend a hand from D-1 to D+3 = April 16th to 20th, 1968. Thank you.

b) Phase 2 Marry with Isaac Boro's 19 Brigade and take Onne D+15 = May 2nd, 1968, at 12.00p.m.

c) Phase 3. With 19 Brigade, take Okrika D+25 = May 12th, 1968 at 12.00 p.m. No opportunity targets. 15th and 19th Brigades in reserve, and not in the final battle into PH. Jimmy please hand over 15th Brigade to Major Yemi Alabi, and RV with me at Aletu Eleme D+27 = May 14th, for final battle advance into Port Harcourt.

6. Lt. Col. Abubakar - Col. 'A' (QMG)

a. Phase 1 - Your Admin & Logistics team to advance with me to Uyo, and to Opobo.

(i) Your deputy will advance with the main body to Oron until our RV at Opobo on D+12 = April 29th.

(ii) Vehicles are very important to us. Go for them.

(iii) Hot meals at all RV as marked on all the maps.

(iv) Medical evacuation team and forward hospitals, as marked on all the maps. Bulk breaking points in **Phase 1** to be at Uyo, Abak, Etinan, and at Opobo, while **Phase 2** will be at Aletu Eleme. All MP signs must be manned and conspicuously marked.

(v) Canoe and pontoon teams will be on site at Opobo on D+12, not Later than 16.00p.m.

(vi) All natives to be organised as discussed.

(vii) Civil defence, churches, schools and markets to open not later than 12.00p.m. on D+26= May 13th, 1968.

b. Meeting with you and the natives at 16.00 p.m. same day D+25= May 12th.

c. Arrange POW accordingly and set up your recruiting centre.

d. Phase 3 - Cross all administrative and logistics troops by ferry and canoe from Opobo and Ekeffe. To be completed not later than 14.00p.m. D+28= May, 15th. Start public relations duties as ONE Nigeria immediately from your landing at Opobo on D+12. Remember the AIM of this PR exercise: when the natives see and hear a Hausa officer, addressing them, encouraging them, helping them, and troops not molesting them. - The battle will be half won. Open schools - Particularly the girls' schools, churches, markets and vigilante units. Liaise with the chiefs and market women. Trading will be by barter. Encourage the farmers to start their farming and fishermen also. Set up complaints centre with the chiefs, and recruit up to 1000 men and start training including up to 50 women. RV with me at Opobo ferry side on D+25= May 12th. Good Luck.

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The Fall of Port Harcourt

The order of battle for Port Harcourt advance was very flexible for all the reasons already advanced. The sectors changed to brigades (Bdes) for the final battle into Port Harcourt. We had the following units from Calabar:

- a. Commander - Lt Col. G. Alabi-Isama (Chief of Staff 3MCDO);
- b. 12 Commando Brigade, commanded by Major Ahmadu Aliyu;
- c. 13 Commando Brigade, commanded by Major Sunny Tuoyo;

- d. 14 Commando Brigade, commanded by Lt. Col. Pius Eromobor;
- e. 15 Commando Brigade, commanded by Lt. Col. Alani Akinrinade;
- f. 16 Commando Brigade, commanded by Lt. Col. Olympus Ayo Ariyo;
- g. 17 Commando Brigade, commanded by Lt. Col. Philemon Shande;
- h. 18 Commando Brigade, commanded by Lt. Col. Ignatius Obeya; and
- i. 19 Commando Brigade, commanded by Major Isaac Adaka Boro.

These were called brigades, but they were of different sizes, made to suit their operations. For instance, Isaac Boro's brigade in the swamps could not have the same number of troops with Shande who was in a much dryer area of operation, and was going to be in a blocking position facing Biafran reinforcement from Aba. The same was for Lt. Col. Pius Eromobor, who was leading both the ambush team and the enveloping troops from the right hook. So, Eromobor had 18 Commando Brigade that we left behind at Itu as reserve to look after Arochukwu/Calabar axis, he also had 13 Commando Brigade which we also left behind to look after Uyo in a blocking position against Biafran troops from Umuahia, and also to look after the killing ground at the Azumini front. The sniper platoon of 50 sharp shooters with me at the ambush operation at Uyo also reverted to Eromobor after the ambush and to serve as security at Bori during commanders' meeting. Each commando brigade was specialised in its area of operation, its orders and tasks, including equipment and fire power.

For instance, Akinrinade had more artillery guns than any of the other brigades, because he needed those for his long reach to and beyond Port Harcourt. He also had the full complement of all arms and services, because he was far away from the main body and virtually independent and standing on his own. He also had the navy in support, whereas Isaac Boro needed more self-propelled hand grenades, and sub-machine guns (SMG) to operate effectively in the swamps, while artillery guns would be almost impossible for him to carry or even be useful to him, and will also hinder his speed. To operate behind enemy lines and for his special operation, he had to travel light. Aliyu, even with an extra 500 swimmers needed fewer troops than Ayo Ariyo who was with the main force. For instance, a greater number of 'Medevac' teams on foot, with stretchers would be required in the swamps than with Eromobor who operated on motorable, well drained and dry areas. He needed an ambulance.

Medical facilities

Everywhere we captured, particularly the big cities with some hospitals or clinics, Dr Nya our Director of Medical Services took such over and the nurses, cleaners, doctors and hospital workers of such towns were gathered together for their services. Towns like Calabar, Oron, Uyo, Itu, Ugep, Obubra, Opobo, Abak, Etinan, Eket and Port Harcourt.

If we can just imagine the situation of many hospitals today all over Nigeria without drips and facilities for blood transfusion, you can imagine what the war front would have looked like. A little shrapnel on the finger or anywhere in one's body would bleed and what did we have to stop the bleeding? Many just bled to death. If an operation was going on and a bomb landed close by, the doctors, the nurses and

all hospital workers would 'of course' try to escape. What would the patient being operated on do?

There had been stories of cotton wool or instruments allegedly forgotten inside patients in today's peacetime Nigeria and elsewhere around the world. One can then imagine a wartime situation.

All the doctors, nurses and hospital workers performed creditably. There were no sufficient drugs and facilities - all the same, we opened a separate hospital for women and children. We also treated wounded and abandoned Biafran troops as well and many recovered and went away, while many joined 3MCDO. Life was not easy but we managed and made the best of a bad situation. Despite the lack of blood bank or blood transfusion facilities or even drips, it was tough to survive out there.

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Initially, 3MCDO had little or nothing that made up a good and effective fighting force. The situation of the trained veteran troops of the old Nigerian Army which were concentrated in 1 Division has been discussed. 1 Division had all the support arms and services of the old army, from the infantry units, to the armoured units, the artillery units, the corps of Nigerian Army Engineers, the air force and the 'recce' units. They also had the Nigerian Army Military Hospitals, including the one at Kaduna, just to name a few of these war essentials. Even 2 Division had military hospitals at Benin City and Lagos, with all the facilities.

3MCDO had the navy, some air force, and the rest and not a single military hospital in our area of operation which stretched from Obubra in the north-east to Calabar, and to Port Harcourt in the south-west, and we covered over a thousand kilometres of 3MCDO operational war area. The trip in a good vehicle from Obubra in the north-east of 3MCDO operation area to Port Harcourt in the south west would take five days by road, with two main rivers to cross, (Cross River at Calabar, and Opobo River) by pontoons, without bridges.

We were hardly able to contact families back home or send salaries to families, which the other divisions took for granted. That was the idea of paying some allowances to troops in the war zones while allotments were paid to the families back at home. For instance, Kunle Elegbede and I borrowed £30 (the currency in Nigeria at the time was £=pounds) each from Adekunle to be paid to our families during one of his trips to Lagos. Not many soldiers had such opportunities.

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There was the impression that 3MCDO fought in friendly areas and that was why we found our tactics and strategies easy to implement. Well, that might be true but I would rather have fought in unfriendly terrain like 1 Division did. When I was posted to 1 Division at Enugu towards the end of the war in 1969, the town was clean and no movement of people whatsoever. Any movement was gunned down — no questions asked.

In 3MCDO area, the children had to go to school, the markets were opened, the churches, the fishermen and the farmers went about their businesses as much as possible. These gave room for Biafran infiltrators and sympathisers to

operate behind our lines. That was why, for a long time, Mr Archibong's spy operations succeeded at Calabar area until we were lucky to capture Biafran infiltrators going to Calabar to poison the water, and of course, Adekunle's lost battle maps.

Even when Akinrinade captured Aba, which was in Ibo heartland, we returned the refugees into the town and fed the natives with our troops' rations. They did not sabotage anything and were too pleased to be fed by our troops.

Dr Nya, our chief medical officer, was a civilian doctor in Calabar who was given a field officer's commission. He gathered all the local doctors around our operational areas, who were mainly volunteers. So, without any military hospital in our area of operation, we had to make do with civilian nurses to treat bullet wounds that they, perhaps, were not used to handling, except bullet wounds of armed robbers in their areas. Even then, they might not be there because armed robbers do not go to hospitals for treatment of bullet wounds.

These doctors and nurses made the best of bad situations; they faced the challenges with respect, discipline and smiles. We had only one captured VW bus we used as ambulance in the entire 3MCDO Division. We were, however, lucky not to have had many casualties during our 30-day advance to Port Harcourt. My salute to these doctors and nurses of the 3MCDO.

Unforeseen situations

Few unforeseen situations happened on the way for which we had to cancel some plans completely, while in some other situations, we had to adjust the plans accordingly. There were some areas where we had earmarked fewer

troops which, in the end, we had to beef up when we arrived on the ground. Some of these are discussed below.

Afam Electric Power Station operation

For instance, we did not know of the Afam power station until Shande got there, and he needed more troops to guard such an installation. It was a Saturday night, and I had advanced together with him from Ekeffe through Akwette to the power station which was not reflected on the map. The aim was to take Okoloma town that night and reach Obigbo by first light next day. We had to change our plan completely. Then we saw a television set in a room there. When we turned it on, it was the 'Mazi Ukonu Show/ then a popular entertainment programme on Nigerian Television, Enugu, which became Biafra TV and was moved to Aba when Enugu was captured by the federal troops. So, we stupidly stayed the night watching Mazi Ukonu Show until it ended, and we continued the advance next morning. I was with Shande because of the importance of his Obigbo blocking operation to the overall success of the advance, and the effect it would have on the 30-day schedule for arrival in Port Harcourt. Should this operation fail, we might find our troops fighting Biafran troops at Obigbo which would delay us considerably.

Our troops on guard at Afam power house, including me, were caught watching TV by Biafran troops that had crossed the river behind us. This was one of the blunders that I also committed in the 30-day advance to Port Harcourt. The river was a tributary of Imo Paver, and was not shown on the map. I was rather lucky because while watching TV with my orderlies and escorts, a Biafran soldier came from nowhere and thought we were fellow Biafrans until he had a good look. He had his weapon and 10 rounds of ammunition, but he stumbled and fell. As he fell, his weapon clattered

towards my feet and I quickly picked it up. On interrogation, we found that he was a deserter who had been stationed at Afam power station before he was sent to Obigbo front. He told us that a new company was being sent to guard the power house and were on their way from Okoloma. He was used to watching TV at the station and since everything was quiet there, he thought those watching TV were Biafran troops. If he had fired, he would have killed many of us watching TV. We abandoned the power station, took him away with us and took a new defensive position awaiting the arrival of the new company of about 200 men. As he told us, they were Biafran troops from Okoloma. There was no other way the Biafran troops could have attacked that position, since we controlled all exits and entrances to the place. We did not appreciate enough the importance of that power station both to Biafra and Nigeria as a whole. That station as important as it was, was not shown on the map. The same station powered the entire Biafra, and part of the Midwest, including the textile mills at Asaba and Aba. I then called on Akinrinade and briefed him of the situation at Afam power station. We got a company of special forces troops from Aliyu who was then at Bori, to attack from the south, while Akinrinade and I, and our escorts attacked from Obigbo side to the west. While the Biafrans were fighting against Aliyu to the south, we enveloped the Biafran company from the west, and so, we recaptured the power station and also took the TV away to avoid a repeat distraction. We did not involve Shande in this attack because of his blocking role at Obigbo.

Abana at Bakassi Peninsula

At Abana, a small fishing village south of Atimbo in Calabar area behind us, east of the Cross River in Cameroon territory, all the way south of Calabar, there were Biafran stragglers that had escaped to the fishing village when

3MCDO captured Calabar on October 17th 1967 and could not escape elsewhere. From captured POW, we learnt that they were in touch with one Mr. Archibong. This was that same friend of Adekunle's, who was caught and shot for espionage in Calabar. But unknown to us then, he was also sending them food, and through them some documents to Biafra. These Biafran soldiers had civilian dresses from the same Archibong who also provided bicycles for trips through Itu to Atan Onoyom, and to Arochukwu. The Biafrans had all our names and they told us that Archibong's contact at Arochukwu was Army Commander Simon Uwakwe. However, when Archibong was finally caught, they had no food and all 17 of them were stranded and needed to escape, so they escaped by canoe in small numbers. But when the first set of four got to James Town, they saw the rear party guarding food and ammunition for Isaac Boro's special forces. Isaac Boro took things for granted, and did not leave enough men to guard their supplies, and these Biafran troops rather than get more people or quietly sneak away decided to attack the base. Again, these Biafrans came through a river behind us. We had thought that we had complete control of all exits and entrances to James Town and there was no way any Biafran troops would have come from behind to attack James Town. It was considered impossible to happen. When the news got to me, I panicked for the first time on the advance, but still managed to keep my cool. I needed to know how large a force the Biafrans came with, and how they got there in the first place. Where could they have been coming from? We had thought that this type of situation had been taken care of. We had troops stationed at Atimbo to take care of any surprises from such areas but definitely not from the Cameroon. We had blocked that route as part of Obubra advance in February 1968.

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The government of Cameroon had been very cooperative with the Nigerian Government, and had never allowed the Biafran troops to attack us from there or to use the Cameroon as a base. I was troubled, because all had gone well so far. I had just returned from Shande, where I had a close shave with death at Afam Power Station, and the main body had just crossed Opobo River on D+17=May 4th, 1968, with only the logistics team yet to cross the river. Well, I had told all the commanders in one of our briefings about this type of situation in history, that it could happen to us after going so far forward, the rear troops under Capt. Kunle Elegbede should watch out for surprises including paratroopers landing at Calabar. I gave them the example in the Holy Book. In, *1 Samuel chapter 30*, King David went to war and prevailed, but the enemy came from behind and took his HQ, captured everybody, including his two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail. He had to go back and recapture his people. It was a great lesson in the Bible, but this one we had was a great surprise. It took 48 hours to recapture James Town and neutralise Abana village.

We learnt once more never to underrate the enemy, and that no matter how difficult situations might be, they are not impossible to handle. It could only be difficult. In the meantime, the advance continued, and I recalled Akinrinade from Bonny, to assist me in moving the advancing troops forward, and also to move our dear logistics team with our

meals and medical facilities, across Opobo River, as we had two weeks left to get to Port Harcourt, or else I would have failed in my promise to Adekunle that Port Harcourt would be captured in 30 days. So, with Kunle Elegbede, by land from Calabar/Atimbo in the north, and Isaac Boro and I, from the sea in the south, we rounded them all up. It was a messy business, and I took extra time to tour Abana and patrolled to the border with Cameroon at Akpa Yafe River after which we had to get back quickly. In the meantime, our advancing troops had reached Bori, and heading on to Aletu Eleme on schedule. We had lost the two days we gained at Opobo. Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo kept the troops moving brilliantly.

Then Akinrinade's brigade, in order to meet the D+15=May deadline for attacking Onne, and with Adekunle on the radio from Lagos insisting that the attack on Onne must go on regardless, and as scheduled, Akinrinade therefore went ahead and attacked Onne. Meanwhile, Isaac Boro was already two days behind because of the Abana problem. The Biafrans pounced on Akinrinade. Earlier on, Capt. Onifade from Ilaro was killed, while Sanni Bello was wounded. I sent a helicopter with two officers to replace the dead and the wounded and to pick them up. Sanni Bello was taken to Calabar hospital and from there, evacuated to Lagos. Then the problem of high and low tides again came to play on his troops. The dry land where they dug in, was flooded by morning, some of the men were washed away and got drowned. Our troops that were captured at Onne were paraded in Port Harcourt by the Biafrans, some of them were even beheaded before they were paraded to show off Biafra's prowess, while we were busy feeding and clothing their own prisoners of war (POWs), some of whom were evacuated to Lagos.

However, Shande who was already in blocking position at Obigbo, and Aliyu who was also in position at Bori were

ordered to relieve Akinrinade of pressure by attacking the rear of Biafran troops at Okrika. These were tactics interdependence at play, and were excellently coordinated. Not a single Biafran soldier was allowed to escape, since the news of what they did to our troops at Onne had reached us through some of our men that escaped. The plan here again, was adjusted accordingly and success was achieved once more.

Opportunity Targets

Another situation in which we had to modify our plan of advance was for the capture of Ikot Ekpene by Major Utuk, which was not in our original plan of advance. After Uyo had been captured by our enveloping troops and after the successful ambush also at Uyo, Major Utuk asked for my authority to liberate his hometown, Ikot Ekpene, which was about 50 kilometres away from Uyo. Well, that was considered an opportunity target, but I had planned that we needed a town like that, which was a non-Ibo town, and close to Umuahia which is an Ibo town, to be earmarked as a buffer town for use by our scouts to spy on Biafran movements. Any further advance to capture Ikot Ekpene meant that I had to provide and plan for troops to occupy the town, and since it was so strategically important, that is, about 80 kilometres away from Aba, same to Arochukwu and to Umuahia, the then known Biafra, HQ, we might get involved in fighting in Ibo heartland before we were ready for it, which might affect our planned 30 days advance to Port Harcourt.

What should we do? I also found out that we had no troops strong enough to hold the town while the advance was going on. West of Ikot Ekpene is Aba, to the north is Umuahia, and to the east is Arochukwu which are all in Ibo heartland, and all about 80 kilometres equidistant from Ikot

Ekpene. But I did not want to deny Major Utuk's request. I then decided to hold a quick meeting with officers in the sector, to get to know their opinion and suggestions on the subject — on how to proceed, and how to get the issue resolved. I then briefed the officers on my concerns, and gave pros and cons of the situation emphasising the fact that Ikot Ekpene was the extension of our security as it was at the border with core Iboland and might not be necessary to occupy the town. It would be better suited for our early warning and intelligence efforts. The 'O' group finally took a decision. Two heads are better than one. Of course they have to be two good heads.

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The meeting decided as follows:

- a. Since we were on time and the Biafrans were withdrawing along Umuahia and Aba roads, we should chase them to defendable areas along Aba, Umuahia and Arochukwu roads.
- b. Utuk would lead his 8th Battalion on the attack that night at 20.00 p.m., of D-Day, April 17th, 1967, from Uyo to Ikot Ekpene. The time then was [II.15a.rm](#), April 17th, 1967.
- c. Instead of the 'killing ground' at Azumini to be confronted from Utu Etim Ekpo in the south, we should close the gap from Uwa in the north. However, we should continue to dominate 'no mans' land' from Uwa to Ikot Ineme, hoping that the Biafran troops would fall into the opened gap. I gave the order accordingly. The Biafrans fell into the opened gap as thought of and as planned at Azumini. Then the gap was closed at Ikot-Ineme. 300 Biafran troops were captured

with their commander, Capt. Ibok, at Azumini, as they fell into the killing ground prepared for them.

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At the time of writing this book, Capt. Ibok was said to be the Chairman of Cross River State Transport Company. So, Major Utuk was allowed to liberate his hometown. He met his father, mother and his other siblings, including his immediate family, and friends. He told me that many of his town's people were killed and many in the prison dead and dying without food and water. Biafran troops called them saboteurs. He thanked me any time and anywhere he saw me throughout the war. At the end of the war, I went to see him and his family at their Ikot Ekpene home. His only car was the old VW car that he had when he was a Lieutenant and my deputy at 4th Battalion at Ibadan in 1965.

After the liberation of Ikot Ekpene, our defence lines were as follow:

— To the west, the line of defence was at one of the tributaries of Imo River bank at Uwa, just about five kilometres on the outskirts of Ikot Ekpene on Aba road, and to the north, the defence line was at Obot Akara River bank on Ikot Ekpene-Umuahia road, where the Biafrans blew up the two bridges at Uwa and at Obot Akara; while we left Arochukwu axis for Lt. Col. Ignatius Obey a to deal with. These were the adjustments we had to make during the advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt. Adekunle was still in Lagos, and was kept abreast of the entire goings-on everyday.

Final battle for the capture of Port Harcourt

The radio announcements

All officers and men on the main centre axis arrived at Aletu Eleme, as scheduled at the rendezvous on May 12th at 12.00p.m., without fail. Akinrinade and Isaac Boro from Bonny sector were to rendezvous on the 14th of May. I then radioed our commander, Adekunle who was still in Lagos, to announce on national radio and television that 3MCDO troops would enter Port Harcourt on the morning of May 18th 1968, and that all should stay at home, and that Aba road would be closed. The announcements went on for three days from May 13th to 15th, from Lagos and Calabar radio and television stations. Adekunle himself was interviewed and, he spoke on the radio and television in Lagos twice and on the third day, which was Wednesday 15th of May 1968, the announcement added that if there were people not in support of federal effort to keep Nigeria one, they may withdraw through Igrita, Elele and Chokocho on Owerri road.

Though I was just boasting, there were reasons and strategy behind the action. The main reasons were:

- a To cause more panic in enemy ranks, as our scouts reported that civilians were already panicking,
- b To get the bulk of civilians off the artillery fire bombardment area with a view to reducing civilian casualties.
- c. Since Port Harcourt was a big city, we wanted to avoid a street-to-street and house-to-house fighting.
- d. We also wanted to ensure that the refugees moved towards one direction, instead of all of them running all over the place, which might result in their being caught in crossfire. In the military, that is 'collateral damage.'

e. We needed more vehicles, and I guessed that since the civilian population, would be the refugees, and would possibly be so disorganised and ill-disciplined, they would not drive in single file but bunch-up together, causing traffic jam, and many might abandon their vehicles and run away on foot. Our scouts at that time had radioed to confirm traffic jams all over the place, and that there were cars and buses abandoned everywhere along the road. Our commando ladies had already mingled with the refugees, and so were Capts. Okwarobor and Sedenu, the artillery forward observers with their radios for the control of artillery fire, since the night of the 14th of May 1968.

f. The announcement also stated further that 3MCDO would start bombarding targets inside the city from the night of May 15th for three nights up to Friday May 17th as 3MCDO would enter Port Harcourt on Saturday morning for the weekend, so those not in sympathy with the federal troops and did not believe in one Nigeria, should escape through Owerri road only, as Aba road was already blocked.

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Providence was on our side. Just as the radio announcements stopped at 22.00 p.m. the third day, we started artillery bombardment on 15th May, 1968 for the final battle into Port Harcourt. The rain started and was heavy with thunder and lightning all day and night. The artillery bombardment went on all day and night. All six artillery gun pieces were massed for the final battle at Elelenwa. Our scouts reported panic among civilians and Biafran troops. Refugees were moving en-masse towards Owerri road as expected and planned for. This radio announcement reduced civilian casualties, and the capture of Port Harcourt on the night of 17/18th May, 1968, was like a piece of cake, as we did not have to fight inside the town.

Send-off party?

All officers arrived the rendezvous, including Akinrinade and Isaac Boro, from their respective locations on time, and we had a meeting of 'O Group' to review and discuss what happened on the advance, where the orders were right or wrong, and to discuss the next seven days ahead of us. It was a debriefing meeting by all commanders. We all had a lot to talk about. All we had laboured for was already within view and within reach. It was like the marathon runner, who could see the tape in front of him during the last lap of the race. We could not afford to fall down now and this was the time to give it all we had. We also discussed our concerns after capturing Port Harcourt, about how to withstand Biafran counter-attacks, which we were sure would come, though unsure of its magnitude or ferocity. We knew that new challenges would certainly require different tactics. The terrain was getting drier and less marshy, but it continued to rain. We rehearsed the final orders on the objectives of each commander inside Port Harcourt. Who takes what — who takes the airport, who arranges security of the airport on arrival of the commander, Col Adekunle, the rendezvous at the Presidential Hotel, and the capture of the following targets: TV and radio station, the water works, the electricity company, the port, the telephone company and the wharf. We were all happy to see each other and we all told stories of experiences on the advance. We had so much to talk about; some happy, some sad, but overall, the plan had worked thus far.

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How we lost Captain Fashola and Major Isaac Adaka Boro

We lost one officer from the main body, Captain Fashola, at Bori Ogoni. Captain Fashola was to arrange for security for the meeting of the main body commanders, after crossing Opobo River. He was also to arrange for breakfast. The meeting at Bori was attended by Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo, Eromobor, Abubakar Aliyu, and I. Just as we were seated for breakfast, there were some exchanges of shots fired between our troops and Biafran troops close to the conference centre. Fashola asked for and obtained permission to see what was happening. In a few seconds, he was hit by a stray bullet and only his dead body was brought back. The breakfast was his last.

Our casualties so far were eight soldiers wounded and two dead, which occurred during the landing at Oron beachhead. There were no officer casualties, either wounded or dead, before Fashola. We all had stories to tell. Then I organised a drinks party to toast our success so far. We then reorganised and regrouped the sectors into brigades for the final push into Port Harcourt. We issued ammunition mainly and everyone was given his new objectives and tasks.

There were no questions as morale was sky high and while I had it in my mind, that the Biafrans must have lured us into Port Harcourt as a killing ground, my fears were wrong. Akinrinade and Boro were to be in reserve, with their two brigades, having had a rough time with Biafran troops at Onne just a few days before.

The main body would take Port Harcourt not later than 12.00p.m., on Saturday May 18th, 1968. Everyone got back to his station and reported, "Battle Ready," except Isaac Adaka Boro. On his way back from the meeting of 'O Group' at Aletu Eleme, Boro was shot by one Biafran soldier who was hiding in an empty house by Okrika waterside. The Biafran had only one rifle and only one round of

ammunition. As Isaac Boro opened the door to look at what was in there, the man fired and right on the spot, Boro was dead. We were all shocked and annoyed.

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Everybody just went to their units and ordered immediate advance, which they did all night. That was why Port Harcourt was captured by 6.00a.m. on Saturday May 18th 1968, instead of the scheduled 12.00p.m. Little did we know that the drinks party we had was a send-off party for Isaac Adaka Boro.

Port Harcourt, here we come

Instead of attacking Port Harcourt town, with all troops getting lost inside the town, each brigade had its objectives. Shande was to hold blocking position at Obigbo. Eromobor would capture and defend Port Harcourt Airport for Adekunle's flight to land at 14.00p.m., on May 18th, 1968.

One of his battalions was to hold the airport, while another battalion was to take Igrita and hold it. Ola Oni would take Chokocho and hold it. Yemi Alabi, former deputy to Akinrinade was then commanding 15th Brigade of Akinrinade and 19th Brigade of Boro when Boro died. He was ordered to take Elele and Ahoada and hold both locations. Ayo Ariyo, Akinrinade and myself were to advance from the airport with the commander for eight kilometres towards Elele.

Thereafter, Ayo Ariyo would hold Port Harcourt. His responsibilities included the telephone company, water works, radio, Electric Corporation of Nigeria (ECN), wharf and Port Harcourt airport. All sectors were to expect massive

counter-attack thereafter. Rendezvous for commanders would be at the Presidential Hotel in Port Harcourt with Adekunle, the commander, at 6.00p.m, May 18th 1968, with the exception of the following officers: Ayo Ariyo, Eromobor, Shande and Aliyu, who were holding strategic positions.

Port Harcourt Captured!

Adekunle arrives war front from Lagos

In Port Harcourt, since Biafran troops were routed, pursuit as occurred in Oron, Uyo and Opobo would not be necessary beyond Igrita, Elele, and Chokocho, as we were then frontally facing the Ibo heartland. We must, however, hold all grounds. We must have aggressive, offensive and defensive tactics by daily patrols with the aim of holding no man's land but not beyond Ahoada, Igrita, Elele, and Chokocho axis, as assigned. No opportunity targets whatsoever.

POWs were to be captured for interrogation. All were to regroup for next advance shortly, but not before 14.00 p.m., May 25th, 1968, and the organogram and tactics must change away from our Calabar/Port Harcourt mangrove and marshy land advance, tactics and strategy. By 14.00p.m. on May 25th, all commanders reported all situations correct, holding their positions and digging in.

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Chapter Nine

ADEKUNLE IN PORT HARCOURT

Adekunle landed in grand style with the world press, and inspected a guard of honour. The air force flew in with Capt. Gbadamosi King, Dan Ato and some Egyptian fighter pilots, who flew their jets into Port Harcourt as part of the arranged guard of honour for the commander. In seconds, the Russian MiG fighters went into action, strafing and bombing Igrita, Owerri and Ahoada. The commander, who came in a civilian flight with the world press went straight into the attack for the mop-up of the airport area. It was a beautiful day, the troops were very proud and morale was high. It was a day of joy indeed; we were all proud to be Marine Commandos. Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo came and hugged me and said, "Congratulations" many times, and so did all the officers. I had to brave it, as I was close to tears.

People trooped out as our troops marched past downtown Port Harcourt, with three jet fighters roaring past in arrow head formation. I heard some of the troops saying proudly that the commander, Adekunle, had arrived. The navy was not left behind, as they too with their two frigates came up from Bonny and started a rapid rate of fire as the air force gave a wonderful show and display of our air power. The civilians had never seen anything like it before. In fact, most had never seen a jet fighter before. I looked at Akinrinade's face, he had tears running down his cheeks; he did not know until I asked, "Jimmy, (that is the name we call each other) are you alright? "You are crying!" He did not know that tears were running down his cheeks, as he was still looking up at the air force display. It was tears of joy It was then that we

hugged, held hands, and went to the rendezvous at the Presidential Hotel.



Hotel Presidential, Port Harcourt, as it looked 18th May, 1968.

In the meantime, Obigbo was already blocked by Shande. The main body of 3MCDO troops led by Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo, advanced into Port Harcourt. We all knew that there would be no fighting inside the city; that there would be no street-to-street or house-to-house fighting inside Port Harcourt either. The encirclement would be complete when all troops are in position at Ahoada, Igrita, Elele, Chokocho and of course Shande was already in his blocking position at Obigbo.

Meanwhile, some Biafran troops that neither died nor drowned at Okrika but were trapped facing Onne finally escaped, but they did not know that Aba road was blocked. They ran into Shande's fire at Elelenwa junction. The casualties were heavy with dead bodies all over the place.

Artillery was pounding all day and all night. It was the final battle for Port Harcourt, and there was no kidding.

After three days of resistance, Biafran defences capitulated. Their troops fled.



Alabi-Isama and 3MCDO troops final battle into Port Harcourt.

The mop up was completed by morning of D+31=18th May 1968 when we had secured Port Harcourt and were within the 6-10 kilometres security zone around Port Harcourt Airport as planned. My heart and soul moved with joy I had promised to be worthy of my Commander's trust and we made it. We went into the rendezvous at the Presidential Hotel for the meeting with our GOC (General Officer Commanding) 3MCDO Division Col. Benjamin Adekunle. It was a party indeed, rather than a meeting. We all had so much to talk about and we had time. The party went on all day and all night, every officer came in turn to congratulate me. Adekunle himself shouted the nick name

he called me several times, “Kokoro”. We shook hands and hugged; troops waved proudly and shouted for joy.



Effect of gas flaring on the terrain, as seen from the air.



Terrain at night. From Opobo to Port Harcourt, gas flaring lit up the night but polluted the environment terribly.



Same terrain in daytime.



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Effect of gas flaring on 3MCDO operation

As soon as we crossed Opobo River, we observed that the weather, the terrain and the vegetation were similar. However, due to gas flaring in the oil fields in the area, the night was like daylight and our troops were able to advance day and night. The special forces of Isaac Boro, Baba Aliyu and Shande were able to move faster day and night. The forward observation officers (FOO) of the artillery, Capt Okwarobo and Sedenu, could clearly see their bombs land

during the advance, and were able to control and direct their fire to the appropriate areas where they were needed. We were lucky that it rained from the 14th to 16th May 1968 in the Port Harcourt area, and we knew that anytime it rained, the Biafrans would be always hiding in buildings due to the rain, so those buildings became artillery targets to flush them out. However, our boots and clothes were black with oil spill. Most of the officers and men had cold and catarrh and were sneezing. When we blew our noses, black material came out with the mucus. My men were sick, but they did not give up. We got to Port Harcourt on D+31 which was May 18th, 1968, when Port Harcourt was finally captured.

Was Port Harcourt the aim?

However, the aim had not been achieved. The question everybody asked was, what was the real reason behind capturing and occupying Port Harcourt? I had to let all the officers and the troops know that the aim was to liberate the entire Rivers State of Nigeria, and establish the government. The aim was different from the objective. We had captured the objective; we needed to regroup, refit, and get on with the details as planned. All records were checked of the dead, and the wounded, including all records of equipment issued to every unit.

Allotments of salaries were cross checked, while allowances to the advancing troops were checked. 3MCDO never paid salaries to troops in the war front; the troops were paid allowances as there was nothing to buy anyway, and the Nigerian currency had been changed in Lagos. Families were given the troops allotments, which included wives, children, fathers and some to their mothers. All the allotment papers were well prepared and documented even before we all left Calabar for Port Harcourt advance. The idea was that if a soldier was paid his salary and the next moment was shot dead with his salary in his pocket, what use was that to him or his family? Many had aged parents,

and were their family's bread winners. Some had house rent to pay, and children's school fees to take care of. The war lasted about 30 months. Where would a soldier keep his pay for 30 months, when there were no banks or any saving facility in the war zone? Troops were advised to write letters to their loved ones, which Ms Anita and her team, the assigned commando ladies collected and sent to Lagos to be posted accordingly. Having done all that, we had a victory party and we all danced and drank, but still with one eye open. The troops in reserve were called forward. Akinrinade's 15 Brigade, and the late Isaac Boro's 19 Brigade, then commanded by Yemi Alabi, had the responsibility of clearing the riverine areas of Abonema, Buguma, and Ahoada.

Biafran Navy joins the fray

These towns were on the Sambreiro River to the east, and Orashi River to the west and were considered by the Nigerian Navy as uncharted waters, on which they would not want to operate, so they could not help. Then suddenly came the Biafran Navy. To make matters worse, they landed their troops at the Port Harcourt wharf, and started advancing into the town, as if they were itching for a house-to-house and street-to-street fighting. We already had plans for that, and Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo engaged them in full battle.

We did not want prisoners of war and would not let any of them escape. So, he radioed Akinrinade and I about what had happened and that the battle was raging at the Port Harcourt wharf. Instead of Akinrinade and I to get there with a sizeable number of troops for the counter attack, we merely went with our escorts of five men each. We were pinned down and could neither go forward nor withdraw, and we had no radio with which to call for reinforcement. Worse, we were unable to reach Ayo Ariyo. We had taken a wrong turning to the Port Harcourt wharf which was where the Biafran troops had landed. It was a battle royale. We deployed our escorts back to back, and firing continued at

rapid rate. Akinrinade and I had underrated the enemy. We saw hell on earth. We deserved what we got. Thank God that we are alive to tell the story.

We started to have some of our escorts wounded, my driver Wilson Okporogwu was able to crawl out with some of the wounded to the hospital and came back with reinforcements, armoured vehicles and commando troops. Then I saw Akinrinade calling on the Biafrans to lay down their arms and that they were surrounded. Suddenly, they started coming forward with their weapons on their heads, and stacked them on the ground. But Akinrinade was just bluffing. Twenty-five of them came out, and there were only four of us left. By the time the Biafrans realised that we were only four, they picked up their weapons and Wilson who had just taken those wounded to the hospital, arrived with reinforcement, and firing started all over again. This time Wilson, who was carrying the wounded to the hospital was himself shot in the stomach. He lost a kidney. Wilson was operated on immediately by Dr. Nya, and one kidney was removed there and then. It was a close shave for Akinrinade and I. It was then that he decided to chase the Biafran Navy but we had no weapons to attack this huge ship in Port Harcourt waters. It was out of range of our small arms weapons, but its shells were landing on target, and causing casualties among our troops. We quickly put our heads together on how to counter this menace, for which we had no answer, not even our navy, because the Biafran gunboat was in uncharted waters. Even the air force could not attack the Biafran naval boat, because it was attacking at night and it was raining day and night and our air force had no night fighting capability. So, we went for a fishing trawler and Captain Salawu and John Lepdung of the 'recce' unit mounted a Panhard armoured vehicle on the fishing trawler. The voyage began in earnest as it sailed out with commando troops, all carrying machine guns and self-propelled

grenades only. Akinrinade and John Lepdung both led the troops to fish out the Biafran boat to destroy it. Our determination was that the ship must be sunk that same night without fail. We set up radio contact and started working on rescue team should they run into a bigger problem than envisaged. A second fishing trawler was ready and I was standing by, with another Panhard mounted by Capt. Salawu the commander of the armoured unit, and troops ready to roll. It was like the British Navy attacking the German ship, the 'Bismarck' of World War II. The fishing trawler and the Biafran Navy finally met at Buguma waters. Akinrinade radioed that there were two Biafran ships in the water, but that we should not leave Port Harcourt undefended, and that he would handle both. The rest of the troops began to shout, "Sink the Bismarck! Sink the Bismarck!"



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John Lepdung had loaded the panhard so full of bombs that there was literally no room for a pin. I felt that was too dangerous even for John and his crew. "What if you had a direct hit on your boat," I queried, but he answered, "Sir, we will be back soon". It was a night battle as the Biafran ships would not come out by day and there were many creeks to hide. Then the battle at Buguma began. We could see the tracers from John Lepdung's panhard firing at rapid rate, with the bombs to follow. It was like Christmas fireworks. All night the battle raged until the morning of May 29th 1968, when the first Biafran ship had a direct hit from John Lepdung's panhard, and sank. At this time, it was daytime and the air force joined in the attack on the second Biafran naval ship. I believe that the second ship was the bigger one of the two ships, because, although the air force had several hits, and was also struck by bombs from John Lepdung, the ship did not go down easily.

Akinrinade and Azuatalam

The two Biafran ships were finally sunk after 24 hours of gruelling fire battle. As if that were not enough, a Biafran naval officer jumped out of the last sinking ship, took a speed boat with machine gun and started firing at Akinrinade's fishing trawler. All troops on board returned fire but this officer was elusive; it was then that Akinrinade let down a speed boat from the fishing trawler and chased this Biafran officer. Even when he ran out of ammunition, he was still speeding and dodging Akinrinade's bullets until both of them ran out of ammunition. Then the chase which lasted from 11.00a.m. to 16.00p.m., a full five hours of chasing and firing ended in Akinrinade finally capturing this officer called Azuatalam.

We finally changed his uniform and recruited this brave young man who gave Akinrinade such a tough time on the waters into 3MCDO. He was later sent to Mons Officer Cadet School in Aldershot UK for further training, and returned as

an officer of the Nigerian Army. It was on that note that the story of Biafran Navy ended. We never heard of or saw the Biafran Navy again in Port Harcourt waters, until the end of the war. All these events happened in the absence of Adekunle, who had returned to Lagos again after his triumphant three days entry into Port Harcourt from May 18th to 21st 1968, and he was briefed accordingly.

Why not advance from Bonny to Port Harcourt?

The plans that were made in Calabar before the advance to Port Harcourt did not only involve the capture of Port Harcourt, but also which way to go; should it be from Calabar or from Bonny Island, as both locations were already captured by 3MCDO.



We had also to think seriously of what next thereafter. Such plans could be adjusted as situations unfolded themselves. Having sold the idea that the advance to Port Harcourt should be from Calabar, and not from Bonny, though it was tough to sell, the idea was finally received and accepted by the commander, with the full appreciation and understanding of the situation on ground, and the reality of issues at that time, as was painstakingly analysed. The considerations for the preference of a 480km journey to one of 80km to achieve the same objective for the same aim were more political, cultural, social, and economic rather than military.

That was why it was a tough sale, because we could bomb our way through, like 1 Division in the Enugu sector, but the methodology of any confrontation is dictated by prevailing circumstances.

Militarily, I was still against attacking Port Harcourt from Bonny Island, because I thought it was not advisable to

attack from that axis. Adekunle kept saying he was not a politician and was not interested in political considerations, so, why should he think that way. He was right. After all, he had captured Bonny Island and Calabar without any staff officer breathing down his neck. That exactly was not the bone of contention, though there was no doubt that the final decision was that of the commander. However, what we had to seriously consider *were firstly*, the situation had changed and, therefore, tactics must also change. *Secondly*, the reception accorded 3MCDO troops during Bonny and Calabar landings, might not, and, in fact, was unlikely to be the same as we got closer to the Ibo heartland, more so, that the political situation at home back in Lagos had also changed. More states had been carved out of the Eastern Region that declared itself the Republic of Biafra.

Besides, what my colleagues immediately did not see was the political considerations and the strategy behind advancing from Calabar to Port Harcourt, rather than from Bonny. If we didn't advance the 480 km and clear the landed territory of the newly-created states of any Biafran threat, those states would not have been able to take off, at least at the time they did. By going the 480 km the administration of South-eastern State could extend to today's Akwa Ibom, thus relieving 3MCDO of the huge burden of managing the civilian population in wartime. We were thus able to focus more on the military task of capturing Port Harcourt.



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The Nigerian government in Lagos, had created new states in the country from the old regions, which were some of the issues people agitated for, especially by the minority tribes, leading to the coups and then the civil war. Therefore, three new states were created out of the old Eastern Region. The governors had been announced but due to the war situation, they could not report at their state capitals. So, the three states created from the old Eastern Region were only on paper, especially the two new states that fell within our own sector of operation. The three new states were, The South-eastern State, which stretched from Ogoja in the north-east to include Calabar and Opobo in the south-west, with Calabar as the capital. The then south-eastern State is today's Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State. If we had captured Port Harcourt from Bonny, the Annang Province which is today's Akwa Ibom State would have been in the hands of Biafran troops. This would have affected our supply lines which would be expected to come from Lagos by ship or from Calabar by air to Port Harcourt. Supplies coming by ship to us at Bonny from Calabar would have been difficult.

Areas from Oron to Eket and Opobo on the Atlantic coast, as held by Biafran troops would have sandwiched our positions to the east and west from Calabar.

However, going the 480 kilometres by road while landing at Oron and crossing Opobo River would *firstly* have made us (3MCDO) to capture the entire Southeastern State, clear it of Biafran troops and fully establish the government of the state. *Secondly*, the entire Atlantic coast from Lagos to Calabar would have been under the control of the 3MCDO and the total blockade of Biafra would have been established. *Thirdly*, our supplies could come by sea, air and by road to Port Harcourt including the evacuation of casualties; which would have otherwise been difficult. *Fourthly*, we had no boats and landing crafts enough to operate with. We had about 40,000 troops to move, to fight, to feed and also there were many creeks in the delta area of River Niger entering into the Atlantic Ocean. How to manoeuvre would have been difficult without our feet on the ground as many of our troops could not swim. *Finally*, what I thought would also be very important to Nigeria and the international community was the fact that in Bonny area, were the oil pipeline, storage tanks and all the facilities of oil shipment which might be destroyed in a war or offensive or invasion as envisaged. This would have been a disaster for Nigeria as well.

The second state created was Rivers State, which stretched from Ahoada in the north to Brass, Bonny in the south, with Port Harcourt as the capital; while the third state was the East-Central State, which comprised mainly of the core Iboland, stretching from Nsukka in the north to Oguta, Owerri, Aba and Umuahia in the south, with Enugu as the capital. It would have been very important and advisable for the two states in our area of operation to be liberated to allow the new civil administrations in the area to come in and establish their governments on the ground, before

facing the Ibo heartland for battle. Militarily, that would also have been to our advantage.

The story reaching us was that the people of these two states were alienated by the Ibos even though many of them were massacred in their hundreds in the northern part of the country during the counter-coup of July, 1966 and the unrest that followed thereafter. War itself is an extension of politics and at our level of seniority, we had to think of all the parameters that would not only militate against the achievement of our objectives and aim, but that would also enhance their achievement, which included, but not limited to the political, the socio-economic and the military situations. With these at the back of our minds, we set out for Port Harcourt from Calabar. We had, earlier on in February, 1968 liberated areas from Calabar to Obubra to ensure that the government of the South-eastern State was established.



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The governor was installed and the civil administration was fully established on the ground in Calabar. That, in itself, was a great victory for 3MCDO and Nigeria, which made it possible to have the support of the people as they now have a state of their own. The support that we are talking about here was of a serious nature to the troops in the area. So, we treaded cautiously in all aspects. The natives settled quickly and life returned to the state capital Calabar and the other towns within the new state. That took away a whole lot of administrative responsibilities off our neck; from the feeding of civilians, to the provision of water, electricity, security, information and the opening of schools, churches, markets and farms.

As a matter of fact, it was when the civil administration was established at Calabar that we started to have meat and salt in our meals. Our troops were getting more comfortable and our main supply route was then shorter. Instead of all our supplies coming from Lagos, we started getting some essential food items from Calabar markets that were opened. I even had milk in my tea, for the first time since October 1967. My boss started to appreciate and see more clearly why attacking from Calabar to Port Harcourt was better than from Bonny to Port Harcourt, even though, militarily, the advance from Bonny was shorter but not necessarily better.

Having achieved that, we were sure that the people of Rivers State would be expecting the same to happen quickly in their newly created state. They had always wanted their own state and administration, which Isaac Boro and his men fought the federal government to a standstill for.



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Attacking Port Harcourt from Bonny was not going to achieve that. The people of Annang on the mainland were part of the South-eastern State whose governor was already in position at Calabar. The governor was advised to start addressing the people of Annang province, which extended from Oron in the south to Ikot Ekpene in the north to Opobo

in the west, by radio, with a view to educating the people on the goings-on and to support federal troops in their area. These silent millions of native supporters were indirectly part of our 3MCDO war effort. If we were able to carry them along, the battles would have been half-won and so would the war. It was important that all our plans included the civilian population and that we solicited their support.

In any war setting, more civilians die in crossfire operation, particularly women, children, the aged and the disabled. Therefore, we tried as much as possible, not to fight in the towns and villages. Anything cultural must be handled with care, as we needed to appeal to their psyche. Once again, the churches, schools, especially the girls' schools, hospitals and the markets were opened. In return, civilians assisted us with security in particular, without which, we would have been advancing forward and looking backwards at the same time.



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From November 1967 to end of war in 1970, in all 3MCDO operation areas, we opened churches. Religious activities were allowed to resume and the people loved it.



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Abubakar, 3MCDO's Man Friday

Since Biafran propaganda was superlative, and the federal government did not have any answer for it, we established a PRO (Public Relations Office) unit under Lt. Col. Abubakar which was responsible for civil administration and dealing with all civilian problems. To start with, we decided there would be no refugees; we also could not cope with POWs, and we had to make life comfortable for the civilians as much as possible and to the best of our ability. Well, here is the story of our encounter with the civilian population en-route Port Harcourt. We gained the support of the people that could have been hostile to us, just by the single effort of Lt. Col. Abubakar.

Lt. Col. Abubakar was 3MCDO Quartermaster-General responsible for all logistics and administration. He was also the Public Relations Officer of the Division. He was, in fact, anything and everything, and man Friday as well. He was always with me at every attack, as well as getting his specific job done. He was simply good. During one of my

logistic operation visits to Abubakar at Opobo before the final battle into Port Harcourt, he took me round to see the number of troops he had trained and the massing of all logistics including ammunition, medicals, water, rear hospital, sick bay, food and the lot. He had also included in the programme, the addresses of the natives, which was our own style of propaganda.

Abubakar, a Hausa officer, kept the rear and the mop-up operations. He helped to resettle the homeless, He re-established the schools and the markets, especially girl schools. He interacted with the civilians amicably, and kept telling them that the purpose of the war was to keep Nigeria united. Although a Muslim, he arranged the churches, (since most people in the area are Christians) and he also encouraged the people to go to Church on Sundays and to pray for One Nigeria. Abubakar was responsible for recruiting the men and women of the area and training them. He met all the chiefs and elders of the towns as we advanced towards Port Harcourt. He was made to solve a number of their problems.

He was responsible for organising the burial of both Christians and Muslims alike. He visited Justice Ntia, our civil liaison attorney, at least once a day to discuss the problems of the natives. He had joint police and army patrols and road blocks with the civil defence team. With these, the stories went around quickly about how nicely the Hausa troops of 3MCDO treated them. They were shocked to see many Yoruba, Efik and Ibibio military men and women in their midst. The natives were very happy to see us. They waved and waved at advancing troops with broad smiles and applause. They were endeared to the 3MCDO and so were we to them also. They came out in hundreds for recruitment, both male and female. One of those that we recruited at Uyo was a teacher, Mr. Akan. He assisted tremendously in organising the natives for recruitment and he kept fantastic

records, the way I learnt and love to keep records. I was later chairman at his wedding and on the 25th anniversary of that marriage, I was again chairman of the occasion.

When I was transferred to the Army HQ as the PGSO, (Principal General Staff Officer), he was my PA, (Personal Assistant), and was then a major. Major Akan as my PA, S/Sgt Alfred Irubor, my able and loyal secretary, and Capt. Okuribido, the education officer whom I had just transferred to Army HQ from the education corps, to assist me with the building of Qualitative Army Programme which I had just started, saved my neck in the army by saving many letters in the files stolen from my office, without which this book would have probably been written from Kirikiri, maximum prison where I had been detained earlier *in 1967*. Maj Akan and Capt. Okuribido finally retired from the Nigerian Army as Major Generals.



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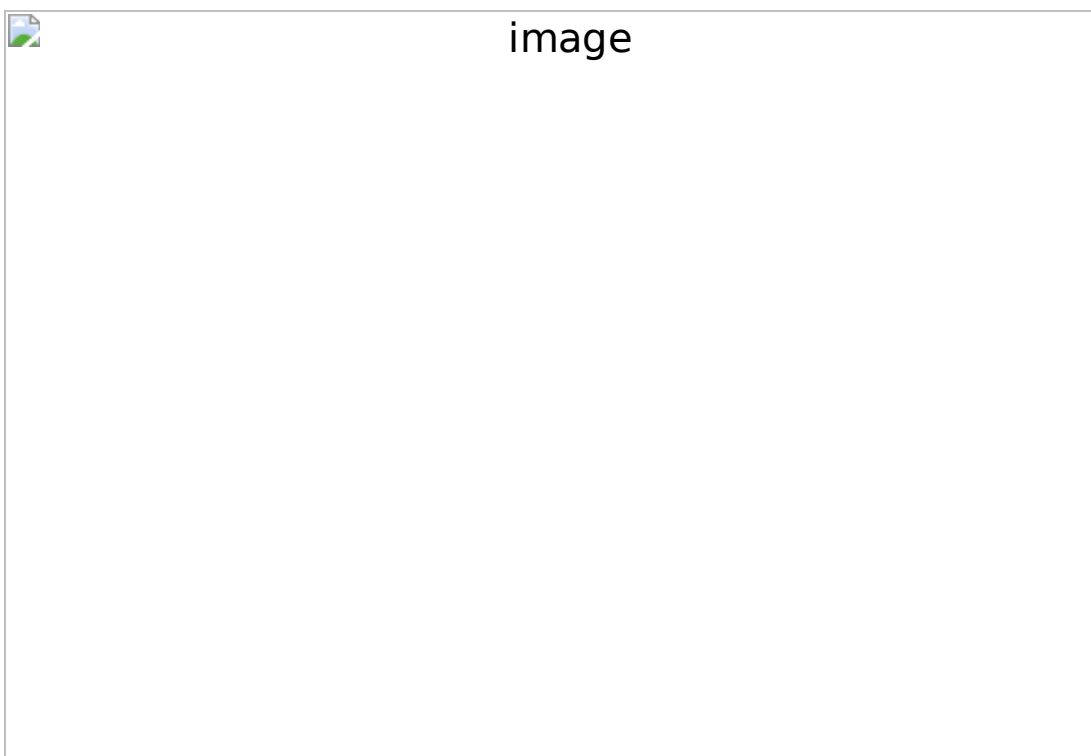


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These young officers, Major Akan, Capt. Okuribido, and my secretary, S/Sgt. Alfred Irubor, got a tip-off on what was being planned against me while I was on an overseas conference, and moved fast ahead of the plotters to save me from big embarrassment and trouble. I must have stepped on toes. These three honest and loyal assistants and many more officers and men from across the country saved and gave me most of the documents now used in this book. There was no way I could have known what to do as I was busy building a Qualitative Army.



Biafran troops were reported to have killed, maimed and completely alienated the natives and sometimes even burnt their houses and accused them of collaborating with us. But that worked in our favour and made our operations easier for us. The Biafrans knew that what they accused the non-Ibo people of doing was not true, but they had to blame someone for their shortcomings. The aim of all our public relations efforts was to counter Biafran propaganda with our

local efforts, and to turn the non-Ibo speaking people against the idea of Biafra, despite their sufferings in the North during the counter-coup and unrests. The bulk of our supplies came from Lagos to Calabar and from Calabar to the forward troops. The distance from Calabar to Opobo, which was Abubakar's HQ was about 200 kilometres as the crow flies, but it took about five to six hours, at best, to get supplies from Calabar to Opobo waterside. This officer had already moved most of our supplies forward from Calabar to Opobo, when the main troops advanced forward into Port Harcourt axis. He had used the pontoons that we built to move ammunition, bombs and food items forward close to Aletu Eleme, our rendezvous.



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He was then ready to move more supplies and reinforcements forward as the final battle was scheduled for May 17th/18th, 1968, when I arrived for inspection. This visit of mine to Lt. Col. Abubakar was at 2.00p.m. on May 12th 1968, to see how he was doing. He was just fine. Everything I asked for was ready and more.

Abubakar also arranged for the chiefs and elders of the towns to meet me and the whole town was there. It was like

a carnival. He had already told them that the 3MCDO Chief of Staff who was the war commander was coming on visit. The whole town trooped out. After my address and thanking the people for their support and all, I asked if there were questions.

Limping civilian at Opobo

Suddenly a man shouted from the crowd and was conspicuous from the way he limped. He asked if he could speak, and we all answered, "Yes" in unison. He asked, "If you people are so nice, why did you kill so many of us in the North? I lost my wife and two children and I only managed to escape. I could not bury them for I had to run away. But here you are talking about ONE Nigeria and looking after us. We had thought that you would arrive here and kill all of us and that was what the Biafrans told us also. So, why did you kill us in the North?"

For about a minute, I did not know what to say, as I was not part of those who killed in the North. I barely escaped being killed myself and the man was crying. There was pin-drop silence. Then Abubakar asked if he could answer the man. I quickly agreed because at that point, I could not think of a convincing and satisfactory answer to the man's question.

Abubakar's reply was very brilliant. He said, "I am sorry that the situation happened at all. It could have been avoided. Even the war itself could have been avoided. The first coup killed all our Hausa leaders and military officers. I am a Hausaman. We had no leaders and no one to trust. We had no one to talk to us about what was going on in the country. Since we were leaderless, everyone was to himself. There was anarchy. To make matters worse, the Ibos were jubilating and dancing in the markets in Kaduna and Kano, brandishing cutlasses and holding dane guns. Then, General Ironsi, another Iboman, became the new leader. He did not

come to the North to address the aggrieved people whose leaders were killed. In the absence of a leader, there was anarchy and that was what caused whatever happened at the time. However, "let all of us open a new page in the history of our country and move on for peace and prosperity, without any more bloodshed."

I wanted to speak, but people did not let me, as they started applauding in appreciation of Abubakar's speech. Even the man who asked the question was clapping his hands. The short speech, delivered in heavy Hausa accent was wonderful; especially when he said, "Since we were leaderless, everyone was to himself. There was anarchy". The logic was, you slapped me first, then in anger I broke your head, and you went to complain to the elders. Yes, we were both guilty, but that was not enough reason to break up the country. The crowd cheered the more.

The meeting was a good one and it ended well. I went blank. I did not know what to say. The morale of the troops and the natives were high. Abubakar told all the troops present to go and hug the natives. Some wept. I did not enter my car; I walked with Abubakar and his officers to his headquarters, about 200 metres to the school soccer field which was used for the address. All the chiefs and elders escorted us and came to see me. The people trooped in, and there were so many still waiting outside to see me.

I was just 27 years old then. I then announced to them that God willing, the 3MCDO will enter Port Harcourt on the 18th May 1968 and I encouraged them to try and listen to their radios and to continue to give us their usual support and prayers, and that they should not allow any Biafran soldier to infiltrate their towns, because, in an attempt to attack such infiltrators, stray bullets may kill innocent people as well. Since I was not sure what next to say, I made

all those around shout One Nigeria many times over and over again.

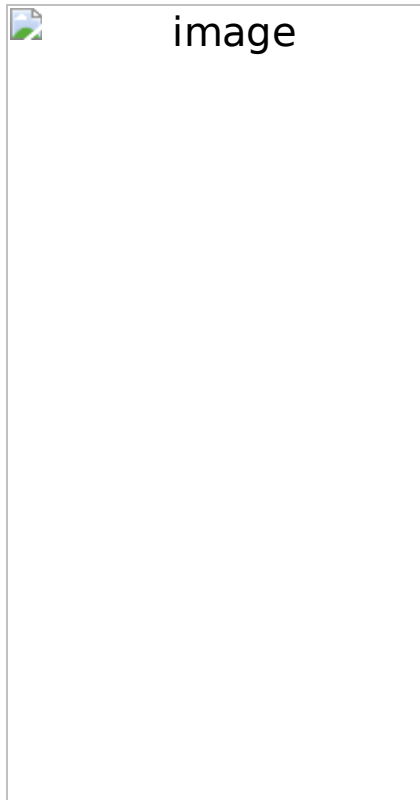
Abubakar, the Port Harcourt Administrator

When Port Harcourt was captured on the 18th of May, 1968, in order to get the civil administration off our back, and before the appointed governor was to arrive, we needed Abubakar to organise the civilians once more as he did at Uyo and at Opobo. That was why Lt. Col. Abubakar was called in to be the Acting Administrator of Port Harcourt when the town was captured. He organised the entire administration in a way similar to, but better than he did at Opobo, and at Uyo, having had more experience on the subject. That gave the advancing troops the confidence to move forward, without having to look back for security reasons.

We realised from the onset and from the planning stage at Calabar, that it was not possible to fight the Biafrans and the natives at the same time. We did not know much about their problems, but surely, we knew that the Ibibio, Annang, Efik, Ikwerre and others in these deep southern areas also suffered the same fate in the North during the unrest as the Ibos, because all people of the eastern part of Nigeria were lumped together as Ibo people at the time. All we were trying to stamp on our consciousness at the time was that we had no escape route, like 1 Division had in the Enugu sector, or 2 Division in Benin sector. So we had to be as friendly as possible with our non-Ibo natives to gain their trust. That was how best we thought we could counter Biafra's effective propaganda. It worked.

What we were also trying to achieve with this approach, was to get the civilian population in all our operational areas to co-operate and work with us to achieve our ultimate goal of keeping Nigeria one. These considerations also had a very important effect on how our units were sized and shaped

apart from the effect of the terrain and weather. It was like a game of chess; we did not have to capture or kill all the rooks before the game was won. Our aim was to get the Biafrans to break down and be defeated mentally before surrendering physically.



That was why we also allowed their POWs to return home and tell the story of how nice we were to them when they were in captivity. We had hoped that when the war would eventually get to their home towns, the will to fight would have been reduced or even eliminated completely, and that was what happened.

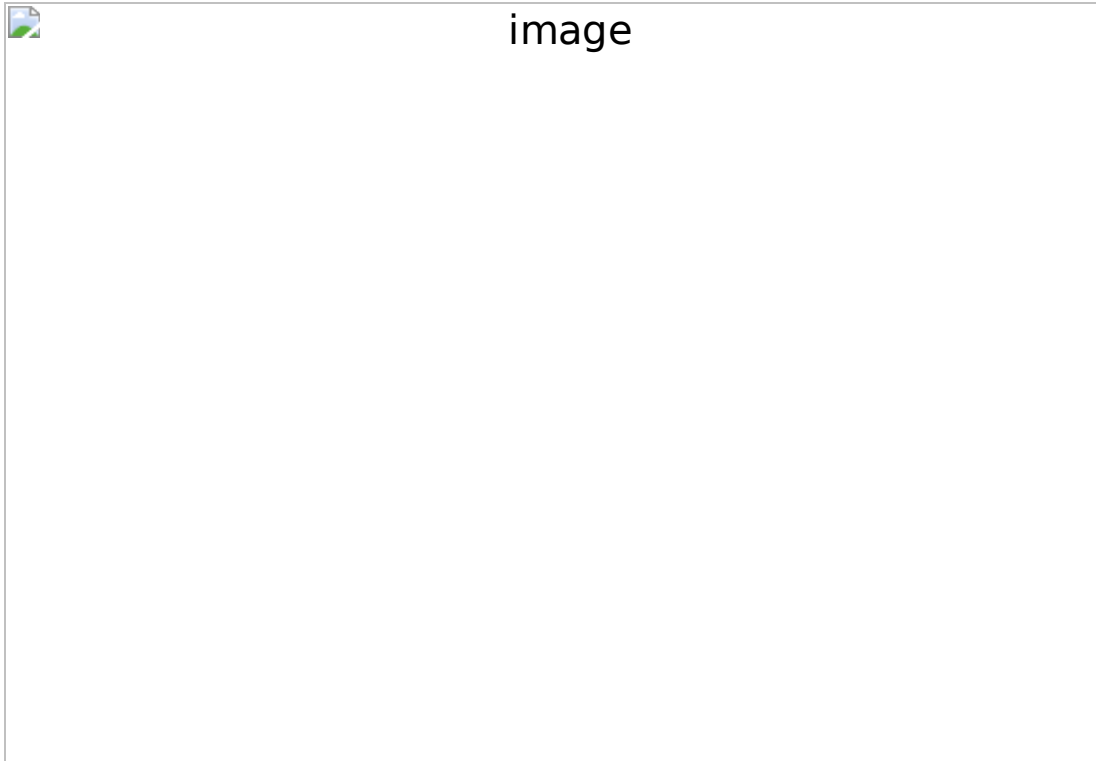
From experience during our operations in the Annang area in particular, we noticed that Biafran leaders did not appreciate that politics and war had the same language and objective, but that different weapons were needed to communicate their messages. The two legs on which Biafra stood were the two southern states adjoining the East-

central State, which were the South-eastern and Rivers States. We were happy that the Biafrans themselves burnt some of the houses of the natives, alienated the people of these two states whom they did not appreciate they would need for their survival in all aspects — economically, politically, socially, and culturally as well. So, the political strategy and tactics of divide and rule came in handy for us. Abubakar's job was to win these peoples' sympathy for what we had to say, but first, we had to disengage them from whatever had tied them to Biafra in the first place.

Now with their own states, we made them realise that what tied them to Biafra was emotional not rational, and that their best bet was to join One Nigeria and forget Biafran propaganda, which they too had come to realise was untrue, because Biafra was still announcing that the federal troops had been thrown into the sea at Oron, while we were already over 150 kilometres away from Oron, heading for Port Harcourt. The refugees returning to their homes also helped us tremendously. They came back as lean as ever, and with tales of woes to tell about their brief stay in Biafra as refugees.

While thinking of all these, we also had to think about our own troops and situation. *First*, we wanted fewer casualties and little bloodshed on our side if we could. We just had to work to achieve that through our plans and strategy. From the study of the maps available, manoeuvre strategy would be very difficult in the Sambreiro creeks, let alone the Calabar, Bonny, St. Bartholomew and Santa Barbara creeks. All these creeks led into Port Harcourt, Abonema, Degema, Onne, Okrika and Buguma. We did not have the landing craft and boats and the necessary equipment for such an operation. The logistic support would have been out of this world, as it would have been very difficult indeed. *Secondly*, should anything go wrong, most of our troops would not be buried at all, they would have drowned and be food for fish.

The troops we had would be more comfortable with their feet on the ground. In all, we had to cross four rivers to get to our objective in Port Harcourt from Calabar, which we did in paddled canoes and we landed finally.



Let us, for a moment, assume that we attacked Port Harcourt from Bonny, advancing with over 40,000 troops in hundreds of dug-out canoes. That would have been a disaster on its own, especially with some of our troops from outside our operations area who barely could swim or had never seen such expanse of water in their lives. At most of our crossings, the dug-out canoes could only take a maximum of six soldiers with their kits. Even a bag of rice or gari was too heavy for the canoes we had. That was why we had to build pontoons at Opobo. The Bonny route would have been most difficult indeed logistically but it would not have been impossible if that was our only chance and choice. Again, apart from the fact that air cover would have been difficult, due to distance from Calabar, the navy would

have given us such fire cover that would have been required and adequate to lead us up to Port Harcourt. But during my co-ordinating meetings with the navy at the planning stage in Calabar, I was told that the navy ships could only advance one behind the other on the Bonny River channel to Port Harcourt, which was the only charted waters into Port Harcourt and which would have made them vulnerable to both air and more importantly, infantry attack. The channel was mined and a fishing trawler already sank to stop any ship from entry.

The Biafrans would have had more options to counter-attack from the creeks of Buguma, Abonema and Degema to the west and also from Oguta, Owerri and Aba from the north, and from all the towns in the Annang and Opobo areas to the east. That would have made Port Harcourt extremely difficult to defend. Whether the Biafrans would have done that or not was not the point. It simply was that militarily, it was never advisable to underrate the enemy. Therefore, advancing from Calabar on the 480 kilometres journey instead of 80 kilometres from Bonny to Port Harcourt was a better option in which all our parameters and assumptions would be met. It was like a situation where you were confronted with fighting ten men alone in an alley. One's best bet would be to keep running and stretch them out into a single file and take them on one by one instead of allowing all the ten men to attack you at the same time in the alley. That is the only way you can defeat them. We, therefore, stretched Biafran troops from Obubra to the north-east and to Port Harcourt in the southwest, a distance of about eight hundred kilometres as the crow flies. Since I commanded 3MCDO troops from Calabar to Obubra, I already knew to some extent what they would rather do and their fighting spirit which was to delay our advance and inflict maximum casualties on us. I never saw or experienced where they punched with an upper cut like in a boxing

match. One would have thought that the Biafran counter-attack to our moves would have been to introduce a heavy punch on one point in a well thought-out objective. For instance, a heavy punch from Umuahia to Oron through Ikot Ekpene and Uyo could stagger and rattle us a bit but we also had provisions for that.

It was like Hannibal advancing into Italy after capturing Spain in 218 BC. The Italian generals had no answer for this African (Carthaginian) general who introduced elephants into the battlefield. He attacked and captured everywhere and anywhere he wanted until a Roman general called Scipio Africanus thought of attacking Hannibal's supply route. The strategy was to allow Hannibal continue his advance into Italy but his home base and supply route from Carthage would be captured and his supply route cut off. That was exactly what happened. However, Hannibal turned back to defend and counter-attack his home base to protect his supply line and his people. Scipio's attack on Carthage was not a mere faint attack; it was a sizeable blow and an upper cut which rattled Hannibal. Scipio did not only defeat Hannibal in that battle — the Battle of Zama (202 BC) — he also destroyed Carthage as a rival power and destroyed Hannibal's ability to stand up to Rome forever. Hannibal's counter to Scipio's attack on Carthage would have been to continue his advance to Rome and use Spain as his new supply route, but because he turned back, creating a vacuum in Spain, he lost the momentum of his advance, lost the battle and lost the war. Like a game of chess, there is always a counter-move and strategy. The same was expected of Biafran troops.

We waited for a counter-blow which never came and by waiting, we lost time, but when Biafran troops finally counter-attacked at Ikot Ekpene, they did not go beyond our already planned killing ground at Ikpe junction where the Biafran commander, Lt. Col. Archibong, was killed. We

buried him at Anua Hospital at Uyo. Lt. Col. Archibong was at the Training Depot at Zaria while I was at the NMS. We used the same officer's mess in 1962. Over and above the fact that I knew Archibong, I wanted us to secure a good name from the people of Annang. He was an Annang officer from the South-eastern State, so he was buried with all Annang burial rites and military fanfair at Uyo. To attack from Bonny Island, would have meant that we would be fighting the old World War battles.

The resources for that we did not have, the troops for that we also did not have. We were purely infantry, advancing and attacking on 'wooden' legs. To fight the same way as the Biafrans did would have been disastrous for us as the officers in Biafra were our best while they were in the Nigerian Army, and I still continue to believe so. Therefore, we introduced the special forces which was a guerrilla strategy. The Biafrans fought conventional warfare. To do the same with them, we would have needed to be at least three to one in strength and weapons, (like 1 Division in Enugu sector) which we did not have. With the guerrilla strategy, we would not give Biafrans the target to attack; but if and when they attacked either the guerrilla troops or the main body of the advancing forces, then their positions would be exposed and their open flanks would be engaged in battle. Locating the enemy in the thick mangrove forest was very difficult otherwise. We never engaged the Biafrans in any frontal battle; which they did most of the time. With our methods, they came to believe that we were everywhere they turned to. In frustration, they threw away their weapons and fled, since they could not use their strength on us.

This situation happened three times during the 30-day advance to Port Harcourt — first at Oron, then at Uyo and the third was at Okrika. With this strategy, we inflicted heavy casualties on them while our own hospital beds were virtually empty. We covered large areas of ground and

gained both time and space with few casualties. In 30 days, we had sliced almost a third of the entire Biafra and covered an area 480 kilometres long and about 140 kilometres deep. From Calabar to Port Harcourt and from Calabar to Obubra, we took the toughest and least expected routes to attack Biafra, and in all these operations, we took them completely by surprise. This again occurred at Iwuru on our way to Ugep and Obubra. We cut through the thick mangrove forest; we climbed the Oban hills and ran down the Uwet valley, while the Biafrans were waiting for us along the roads leading to the towns and inside the towns at Oban, Ako, and at Ekang. We had our forward locations at Mbebu, and dug in seriously. We never took those ways from where they were expecting us to attack. While they sat down there waiting, before they knew it, we had appeared behind them at Ugep on our way to attack Obubra. The next happened at James Town with Isaac Boro.

The Widenham Creek was impassable but with little effort, we went through all these manoeuvres which couldn't have been possible if we had attacked from Bonny Island, where we would have been creek bound. With all these points made and more on the map, my commander, Col Adekunle finally accepted. But not until his map of attack through Bonny was stolen, the strategy, plans and even the rationale to go on a long journey were not easy to sell to him, or to many of the other officers.

Chapter Ten

BIAFRA RECAPTURES IKOT EKPENE

The long awaited Biafran counter-attacks started to come in trickles, and one of them was the counter-attack at Ikot Ekpene. 3MCDO had captured Ikot Ekpene on 18th/19th April 1968 in a double envelopment. We established our defences on the outskirts of the town, at Uwa to the west, and at Obot Akara to the north. We just did not want to be sucked into fighting troops from the core Iboland before we were ready for them. However, we had contingencies for such eventualities. These were expected situations, as Lt. Col. Obeya was at Itu with 18 Brigade in reserve, which was why he did not see action during the capture of Port Harcourt. He was holding a very strategic position in order to avoid Biafran troops springing a surprise, should they decide to attack either Calabar from Ikot-Okpora, or attack Ikot Ekpene from Umuahia, or to attack Opobo from Aba. Since Biafran officers were still reading books of the First and Second World Wars, we assumed that their tactics for a counterattack would be that of the 19th century type, and that was what they did most of the time. Should they, however, shift for whatever reason from conventional warfare to something more brilliant, we also had some answers waiting to counter whatever such moves would be at Ugef, Calabar, Azumini and at Obigbo. We thus doubled our plans and each commander was waiting for them as planned. In military strategy though, we have what is called “friction”, which is the difference between what had been planned and the reality on the ground.

Should Opobo, Ikot Ekpene and Calabar be counter-attacked by a sizeable force of Biafran troops, only Ikot Ekpene and Calabar would be very serious because those two towns

were the two legs on which 3MCDO stood. For Ikot-Ekpene would have led them to Oron and cut off our supply lines to Port Harcourt; that could have destabilised us a lot, as Oron was 3MCDOs centre of gravity. If, however, the attack was from Calabar axis, then it would have been an upper cut which could have dazzled us because we were trying to establish a state government, and not only that, Calabar was our main supply point, both as our only airport, and seaport as well, until we could capture Port Harcourt.

So, when Ikot Ekpene was attacked in June 1968,¹ I was not surprised; but for Biafrans to capture the town was the real surprise. Firstly, the officer there, commanding 13 Brigade was Major Sunny Tuoyo, a very seasoned and capable officer. How then could the town have been captured? For the counter-attack, yes, we were expecting that and we had worked out a plan that if and when executed, the Biafran troops would never show up in that sector again, by the time we had finished with them.

This situation occurred just as soon as Akinrinade had completed the naval battle of Operation Sea Lion in the creeks of Buguma, Abonema and Degema.

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If, however, the counter-attack at Ikot Ekpene by the Biafrans was just their usual feeble counter-attack as was expected, I would have taken my time to visit the brigade on the ground, travelling by road. Port Harcourt to Uyo was about five to six hours drive across enemy lines from Port Harcourt to Uyo and then to Ikot Ekpene. The Brigade HQ was at Uyo and 13 Brigade was the Scorpion Brigade. They had Scorpion inscribed on their vehicles and clothes.

Scorpion was their insignia. True to our assumptions and expectations of what Biafran troops would do, which would be visceral, Major Sunny Tuoyo could not hold out, so he called me at 3MCDO HQ at Port Harcourt. The fact that the town was attacked and retaken by Biafran troops was the main reason I wanted to know why and how? In the meantime, Akinrinade was still busy clearing the creeks of Biafran troops. So, I quickly called a meeting of other officers led by Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo, to intimate them with the situation at Ikot Ekpene, and I left by helicopter immediately.

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My escorts went by road in two vehicles. I went in a helicopter with my RS 301 radio to be able to communicate with Adekunle who was still in Lagos and with Akinrinade and Ayo Ariyo who were left to look after 3MCDO operations in the entire Rivers State and Port Harcourt in particular. We knew that we could not have travelled the entire length of 480 kilometres from Calabar to Port Harcourt (and with our right flank opened to Ibo heartland), without a fuse being blown, so, we were ready for it and we put our already prepared plans into action.

When I got to Uyo, at the Brigade HQ, I was briefed on the map on the military situation and generally on what had

happened. The battalion commander at Ikot Ekpene, Capt. Audu Jalingo had captured some hungry POWs who said they had not eaten for two or three days. Many of the refugees returning to Ikot Ekpene were so lean and sick that Audu gave them some food, and fed the Biafran POWs. He also gave some food to the POWs to be sent to the Biafran forward troops facing them as well. So, as we advanced to Port Harcourt, the battalion and indeed the brigade were fraternising and dining with the enemy.

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In fact, it got to a stage where they arranged a soccer match between Biafran troops there and 3MCDO troops at Ikot Ekpene. For about fifteen days or more, this situation continued unchecked. It was during the soccer match at half-time that the Biafrans swooped on the 3MCDO troops, captured all the players and the spectators as well as the town. When I asked Audu Jalingo what had happened, he said that, we had talked about One Nigeria, and he saw the way we had treated POWs at Calabar and Opobo, that he thought he should be kind to them and above all, there had been no fighting on both sides since 20th April, 1968 until the soccer match in which 3MCDO was leading by two goals. When the third goal was scored and the Biafrans had not scored, tempers flared up and they just pounced on them.

That was the story. Audu was so angry and he wanted to go right away and fight and vowed he would not take any POWs. I told him never to attack any enemy positions without proper intelligence report, and without proper preparation, no matter how strong he thought he was. So, patrols moved out to Ikot-Ineme, Uwa, Obot Akara, and to Ikot Ekpene itself.

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Some of our commando ladies and some old women and children went as refugees, just to get us some needed information about enemy positions, situations and preparations while we prepared for the counter-attack. I told Audu to sit down and since we could not implement plan A', we had to put plan 'B' into action. Plan A' was our response to a counter-attack, and if the counter-attack was so strong as to capture the town of Ikot Ekpene, then we will put plan 'B' into action.

In this case, the town had been captured, but without a major fight. All our supplies and ammunition including the newly supplied Russian artillery gun with which we were training were captured. As usual, the Biafrans got bogged down inside Ikot Ekpene fighting our only company on guard duties at Ibibio State College on the outskirts of the town. For two days, the Biafrans could not dislodge the company from Ikot Ekpene town. So, the company holding out was ordered to pin down and spread in sections of ten across the town. They were not to be reinforced but must have enough ammunition to hold on for just one more day to put plan 'B' into action, and for our patrols to get back with whatever information they might have gathered on the enemy.

Plan 'B' was a double envelopment like the Battle of the Bulge of WW II. While the troops on the main axis of Ikot Ekpene — Uyo road would be dug-in at Ikpe junction, western envelopment would advance from Abak on the left and the eastern envelopment would advance from Itu on the right while the troops holding on at Ikot Ekpene would withdraw to our already planned rendezvous by running to the rendezvous at Ikpe junction, which was the place prepared as a killing ground for plan 'B'. The Biafrans must see them running and we hoped they would pursue our troops. As expected, instead of an organised attack, the

Biafrans pursued our withdrawing troops until they got to Ikpe junction, about 20 kilometres south of Ikot Ekpene, on Uyo road towards Oron waterside. In a situation like that, we expected and envisaged, that their main troops, seeing what appeared to be a success, since our troops were running away, would have massed up their troops to advance forward and so they did finally. It was getting dark, and all night long, there was firing.

We were dug-in at Ikpe junction waiting for their advancing troops. Our counter-attack was for 06.00a.m. the next day, and by 23.00 pm that night, Audu reported all his troops had arrived Ikpe junction, he had only one soldier shot on the thigh, which he brought along to show me, and he was still swearing that he would not take any POWs and that, he would kill them all.

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He wanted to start the advance that night, which I refused. Before then, all the patrols reports, and those of the refugees, and the intelligence team had come in.

The advance plan was completed; all 13 Brigade officers and men were battle ready. Major Tuoyo, S.S. Tomoye, Capts.

Ighodalo, Musa Wamba, Haruna, Gagara, Ekpo, Bassey, Ishola and Olatunbosun were ready with their units, and itching for battle, just because of the betrayal by the Biafran troops. In any case, I was not going to do that; we needed a carefully executed plan of attack, not a fire brigade approach to problems, especially since we had thought of all these mishaps, and also had planned what to do when they happened. I was very calm while everybody was pacing the floor and going and coming without sleep. I learnt never to take any decisions in anger, and I was used to sleepless nights and restless days anyway especially during the 30-day advance to Port Harcourt. I did not bother to scold anybody. I completed the plan, all officers had their instructions and I just took charge immediately. As in a boxing match, the reason why a fighter tries to hit the head, nose, ears, and eyes of the opponent is to throw him off balance, and make his knee buckle. Once the legs are weakened, then the final upper cut will check out the opponent.

In the Holy Bible, when Samson had been deceived by Delilah, and Samson became blind, all he asked of Delilah was to be taken to the pillars on which the arena stood. There has never been any power that stood without legs. If the Biafrans were to get to Oron, they would have broken one of our legs; if they got to Calabar, they would have broken both of our legs. So, for us, Ikot Ekpene axis was a 'no go' area for Biafran troops but having reached there, and even advanced up to the killing ground at Ikpe junction, the battle was over for the brigade, it was then a 3MCDO HQ battle as far as I was concerned. I took charge of the situation accordingly.

How Audu Jalingo lost his two legs

At 6.00a.m. Musa Wamba to the left from Abak took off while Gagara to the right also commenced advance towards Ikot Ekpene in the second envelopment plan. Sunny Tuoyo, Tomoye and I proceeded frontally on Uyo-Ikot Ekpene road. Musa Wamba was to capture Uwa on Ikot Ekpene-Aba road while Gagara would capture Obot-Akara on Ikot Ekpene-Umuahia road. These were their former positions before the soccer match. I did not allow Audu Jalingo to advance with us; his battalion was in reserve at Ikpe junction. By 14.00p.m., Ikot Ekpene was retaken. We did not fight in the town, and as usual captured it by going around it, in envelopment tactics. Audu Jalingo's troops then went back into Ikot Ekpene and took over their trenches to defend the town. In the meantime, Audu Jalingo alone without his troops went to Gagara to the right to help on the right flank advance. When we had re-captured the town, I saw Audu Jalingo sitting by a tree and I went to join him with S.S. Tomoye. As we sat there chatting, we saw some Biafran troops that were cut off on Ikot Ekpene-Itu road to the right running away. The first to get up was Audu Jalingo, followed by Tomoye. I was just sitting there waiting for Sunny Tuoyo to join me as that was our rendezvous. Audu Jalingo, a very tall man of about 1.7 metres or more, stepped on a Biafran home-made mine called, "*Ogbunigwe*." His two feet were blown sky high and landed by Tomoye's feet. This was how Audu Jalingo lost both legs. He survived, and later came to see me at my mother's house in Palm Grove in Lagos after the war in crutches. He said he never got a dime from the military. He was retired, and I had to buy him a wheel chair.

image

Mike Ajegbo wounded

Audu Jalingo was my only casualty during the Ikot Ekpene counter-attack. Biafran casualties were many including Lt.

Col. Archibong, one of the commanders of the advancing Biafran troops. He was buried at Annua General Hospital, Uyo. *First*, we knew him at Zaria when he was an instructor at the recruitment training centre and I was at the Nigerian Military School (NMS). *Second*, we had to play some politics there because he was an Annang officer from the minority area in the South-Eastern State, and we wanted the natives to know we cared, and that we were not what Biafran propaganda claimed we were. The natives were pleased to see that done. Till the end of the war, Biafrans never returned to Ikot Ekpene. Once again, the plan worked. Adekunle was still in Lagos and Akinrinade was still holding fort in Port Harcourt, after clearing the creeks of Biafran troops. Other commanders, Ayo Ariyo, Eromobor, Shande, Aliyu, Yemi Alabi, were still holding on to their positions in the Port Harcourt area. They were training, refitting, reorganising and waiting for Adekunle's arrival with the supplies and reinforcements that he went for since the last 40 days or more. It was also during this attack to recapture Ikot Ekpene that Mike Ajegbo was shot in the shoulder, just before Major Archibong was killed. We finally met after the war. He had become an attorney and I had left the military. Mike registered my company, Satcom Limited in 1985, and has since been my attorney.

Biafrans recapture Azumini, Akwete

There are many things that I never understood in life and this was to be one of them. When we were young officers, we criticised the senior ones for being too conservative and conventional, always reading the old military books with the old military principles and tactics. I was 20 years old in 1960 when we got independence and we were expected to be the so-called leaders of tomorrow. For us, that tomorrow was right there and were even worse than those we criticised then. Sometimes, I begin to wonder if the Nzeogwu/Ifeajuna

January 1966 coup was worth it, and when we all got there, what good came out of it for the people other than to some opportunists, at the expense of the masses. We now have more beggars, and abject poverty in the streets across the country than in 1966. It is now clear that we were just fighting for our pockets. Now I know. What makes a military leader think as if those who were sent to fight and die were not other people's children; and, of course, their own children were quietly kept abroad while others died for their greed.

The military situation at Azumini and Akwette was pathetic, as soldiers were killed almost to a man. Akinrinade came to tell me that Adekunle had just arrived Port Harcourt and was talking about OOAU — that is, for the capture of Oguta, Owerri, Aba and Umuahia for October 1st, Independence Day celebration as a gift to Gowon. Well, I thought that he was joking, and so did Akinrinade, until the commander called Lt. Col. Philemon Shande to attack Aba from Obigbo.

In the meantime, Akwette and Azumini were being attacked by the Biafrans at the same time. Did the Biafrans not see deployment of our troops to the area, or were they just fighting without intelligence reports about 3MCDO activities in the area? We had so many gaps that we could not cover all over the place, their conventional and frontal attack on Ikot Ekpene was so poorly done that I did not even deploy our reserves to recapture the town and beyond. A good and heavy punch would have had a better result not just sending few men to go and die; they were other people's children. Akinrinade and I always pitied them when we laid ambush and they sang past: *"We are Biafran soldiers/ Fighting for our lives/In the name of Jesus/We shall conquer."* We were sure that Jesus was listening but they must first do the will of God. They were just killing anyhow, like at Abagana, and at Onne. They killed all our POWs that

they captured while we were busy feeding and clothing theirs.

For instance, after we had captured Port Harcourt, a Biafran force of no more than 100 landed at the Port Harcourt port; to do what, in a well fortified city held by 3MCDO? Maybe only to cause casualties but for what purpose? To send 100 men to their early graves? The Biafrans reacted exactly as we had assumed and envisaged. Why will any military commander worth his salt attack Azumini? Akwette maybe, because of the Electric Power Station in the area. If the troops that the Biafrans attacked with at Ikot Ekpene, Akwette, Azumini and the Port Harcourt port were massed and made to punch through Calabar or at Ikot Ekpene, all the positions of 3MCDO from Port Harcourt to Oron would have been untenable. The Biafrans must have sent less than 200 troops to attack Akwette and may be another 300 to attack Azumini; and here was Adekunle talking about OO AU for Gowon. It was no more military but egocentrism, and from that juncture on, I started to suspect that Adekunle was no more fighting for Nigeria but for his ego. His long stay in Lagos and his long absence from the war front must have played a great role in his new thinking. I am sure that he knew that someone's child would die needlessly in an unplanned attack.

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We counter-attacked Akwette with vengeance and since we had planned for it, especially the counter-attack at Azumini, there was *no shaking*. In my counter-attack plan for that area, we had troops strategically stationed at Obigbo, Bori, Akwette, Opobo, Ekeffe, and Azumini and at Etinan under the command of Capt. Olatunbosun. I did not believe that the Biafrans had a clear plan of what they wanted. Did they just counter-attack for its sake? Otherwise, what would they be doing with 100 men landing at Port Harcourt harbour and going nowhere? To advance, they would have needed to recapture not only the town of Port Harcourt but also to advance and recapture the 480 kilometres already covered by 3MCDO in 30 days. If, however, they had decided to go south to Bonny, they would have been required to travel at least 80 kilometres and to hold the Island of Bonny. The Biafrans kept doing the same thing and making the same mistakes, over and over again. They did the same thing during their invasion of the Midwest. They went so far as to Ore before their officers abandoned their troops and ran away, just for the troops to be killed one by one. What military tactic was that?

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Biafran troops that attacked Akwette and the Electric Power Station were allowed into the same corridor as Azumini and were cut off completely and all were killed. Did their officers not realise that there was a corridor between Imo River and Kwa Iboe River? Once one was in-between those corridors, it was either death by bullet or by drowning. Their officers were too far behind to read the battle. When I saw these sites, I was sick to my stomach. Akwette was recaptured and so was the Electric Power Station after only two hours of fighting, and with so many dead. There was blood and

floating dead bodies on the flowing rivers and everywhere. So, at Azumini, we had to do it differently as I was really tired of seeing dead bodies everywhere — on the roads and in the waters. These were the same waters that were available for drinking to our 3MCDO troops. So, at Azumini, we refused battle, and allowed them to go down south to the killing ground at Ibesit heading further south towards Opobo. We laid ambush at Ibesit, into which they fell completely. For every one shot that we fired, they opened up in rapid fire, and they even forgot that the farther they went, and away from their supply line, the more difficult it would be to get ammunition in such a suicide bid.

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Then we closed the corridor from Utu Etim Ekpo to the right, and from Ekeffe to the left while Capts. Olatunbosun the ambush commander, with Haruna, Musa Wamba, Bassey and Gagara at Etinan just rounded the Biafrans up. When they realised that they were surrounded on all sides and our troops were ordered not to kill anyone but to fire to the sky over their heads, from all the sides even behind them at Ikot Esien, they knew they had had it. A total of 300 Biafran troops were rounded up. They quietly laid down their arms. Some still ran away, and were allowed to escape to tell the story. At the end of the battle, nobody was killed. The 300 Biafran troops surrendered with their commander, Capt. Ibok. These troops would also have been sent to their early graves.

Where were these 300 troops sent to and what were the aims and the objectives? Could 300 soldiers capture Opobo? I did not even deploy my reserves stationed at Opobo for this fight. When we finally got settled and Captain Ibok was interrogated, he told us that he was ordered to advance to capture Opobo if possible and when he advanced without

any 3MCDO troops on the way, he just radioed that he had captured Ibesit and that he was heading to Opobo when they heard firing everywhere including from areas behind them. He added that until I shouted that they were surrounded and to put down their arms, they were not sure what to do next.

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Three hundred mothers somewhere would have been plunged into mourning for their dead sons. I sent all of them to Uyo 13 Brigade HQ to be retrained and anyone who wanted to go away could do so. All of them joined the 3MCDO and I called Adekunle to come and see.

The Biafran commander Capt. Ibok spoke very well and answered all my questions intelligently. They were all fed and kitted and became part of 13 Commando Brigade at Uyo, while Capt. Ibok became my Personal Assistant until the end of the war. His main duty was to lead me into the positions of all their other units in the area, a task which he performed creditably.

After Adekunle had seen the 300 captured Biafran troops and their retraining, I asked if we already had the supplies for the regrouping in readiness for the advance into the Biafran core homeland. He did not know that Akinrinade had told me about OO AU and I did not mention it either. Then Adekunle said that there would be a meeting in Port Harcourt the next day. I needed just a few more days to redeploy all the troops in the area, as I thought that we had not seen the end of Biafran suicide attacks yet. Adekunle allowed two days and rescheduled the meeting at Port Harcourt for all commanders to attend. I was still Chief of Staff and I kept asking about the planes and the shiploads of supplies, if all had arrived with reinforcements including

armoured vehicles. He kept saying we would discuss all that at the Port Harcourt meeting.

So, after my two weeks at 13 Brigade and the entire sector at the conclusion of Azumini battle, I left for Port Harcourt accordingly. What we wanted in the refitting exercise were reinforcements for each unit to beef each one up to the required strength, replacement of damaged small arms, new uniforms, boots and socks. Even more than anything else was foot powder for blisters on our feet. I asked again if all these were on the way, to which he said they would be, but time was of the essence. On the third day, which was May 21st 1968, he left for Lagos without addressing the officers and men on the 30-day advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt. All the same, all of us had our fingers crossed, hoping for the best. The crossed fingers soon became numb, as nothing came after another three weeks of absence. We thought that he must have been having difficulties, as nothing happened easily in Lagos. We waited and waited and finally, the bombshell.

The bombshell

Adekunle, the General Officer Commanding 3MCDO arrived Port Harcourt in style after the capture of the town on Saturday 18th May 1968, following his 30 days stay in Lagos, purportedly to collect and ship supplies to the 3MCDO war front. With the arrival of the Nigerian Air Force jet fighters and the world press with him, he was riding high, because since February 1968, when we captured Ikot Okpora, Ugep, Ediba, Itigidi, Afikpo and Obubra, the national radio and TV across the country, were announcing daily the towns 3MCDO had captured. There was no day the radio and TV did not announce the capture of a town by the 3MCDO Division of the Nigerian Army. Of course, throughout our advance to Port Harcourt, as radio and TV kept

announcing the capture of one town after the other, all programmes would stop for such announcements. It was *breaking news*.

The whole country was singing Adekunle's praise, as if there was no other officer in the military. Even when he was not at the war front and was interviewed on the TV in Lagos about what he was doing then, on Tuesday May 14th, 1968, while still in Lagos, he had announced that he had blocked Aba road, and that all those who did not believe in One Nigeria, should go out of Port Harcourt from Owerri road only, as he would start shelling Port Harcourt that night for three days. He also told them that he would capture Port Harcourt by 12 noon on Saturday May 18th, 1968 and that he would spend the weekend in Port Harcourt. All that was happening even when he was not at the war front. The whole country was happy and musicians sang his praise everyday, and his name was on every person's lips, including school children.

He was the hero of the Biafran war. None of us ever spoke with the press, and nobody had heard of any of us other than Adekunle. He had also made so many enemies among his other divisional commanders whose names nobody heard of except about the disasters at Asaba and Abagana and Lt. Col. Danjuma's capture of Enugu. On Tuesday May, 21st 1968, he returned to Lagos again from the war front after his triumphant entry into Port Harcourt on the 18th May, with a view to sending all already gathered supplies, reinforcements, heavy weapons and whatever was available, to us in Port Harcourt, for the defence of Port Harcourt and the advance into Ibo heartland. Recall that this was the main reason why Adekunle was not present during the 30-day advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt. He was expected to have spent that amount of time in Lagos to enable him ship in, as usual, all that we would need to hold Port Harcourt against expected counter-attacks from Biafran

troops, as we were getting close to Ibo heartland. We were always conscious of Biafra's existence and resilience and we had always remained on our guard.

We expected also that because of the importance of Port Harcourt to Biafra, the counter-attack would be massive and bloody. It had been a major strategic victory for the Federal Government of Nigeria because the sea blockade of Biafra was total after the 3MCDO had earlier captured Bonny Island and Calabar port. With our capture of Port Harcourt, over 80% of Nigeria's oil business, the main economic lifeline of Nigeria was now in the hands of the federal government. Biafra had three main airports at the time, one at Enugu, which was already captured by troops of I Division advancing from the North earlier on at the start of the war, while we had also captured the second airport at Calabar in October 1967. The third one was the Port Harcourt airport, and also their major seaport, which had just been captured on Saturday May 18th, 1968. With these, the defeat of Biafra was only a matter of time as their initial population of about 12 million and land space had shrunk to less than a third.

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Other than the military and government officials, almost everybody else was a refugee, due, in part, to the propaganda of their government, which told them that federal troops would kill all of them if and when they were caught.

Therefore, the four to five million population of refugees inside Biafra did not know where they were going, which food they would eat when they got where they were going;

as these so-called Biafrans had no known farms nor farm infrastructure. They were a nation of traders and business people, but for Biafra, it was not over yet. Not just yet.

Their leaders whom all the people trusted so much to help them out of all their problems, only compounded the problems and had no answers for the people except whom to blame. They evacuated villagers completely from their homes to nowhere in particular. The people starved and starved and by that, they overstretched their logistics.

Biafran officers had rosy cheeks while their people starved; but they blamed the Federal Government of Nigeria for their woes. I had thought that these were educated people who knew and could differentiate right from wrong, even some that were not born at the time of war in 1967 still talk about Nigeria's genocide on the Ibo people. 3MCDO did not operate in Ibo area until the latter part of the war when 3MCDO operated at Aba, Owerri and Uli-Ihala to end the war and the suffering. We were at Calabar, Uyo, Ikot-Ekpene, Obubra, Opobo and Port Harcourt! The genocide if any, was definitely not in 3MCDO sector.

That is still happening even as I write this book, where the leaders feed fat at the expense of the people, and the public still hails their stolen riches. As a matter of fact, there are bank managers that are alleged to have more money than the banks they manage. Like Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the late popular musician sang, "Nigerians are suffering and smiling." All the same, we had planned our strategy and tactics awaiting their counter-attack. And if it came in waves, as we had also expected, then we were going to find it difficult to hold out. We also thought that due to the importance of Port Harcourt to Nigeria, anything that Adekunle asked for, he would get immediately with no questions asked.

In Calabar, during the debates on this subject, it was as if we were acting a play. Adekunle would act 3MCDO one day and I would be Biafra and vice versa to enable us look at the situation critically and objectively, and what one would do if one were in the other camp, and what counter-strategy to apply, if one were on the opposite side as well. It used to be a very serious, hot, and realistic debate. I loved leaders like Adekunle. Unfortunately he derailed, which I think was as a result of his long stay in Lagos. Well, I wonder if I could blame him too much because he used to live with the then governor of Lagos, Col. Mobolaji Johnson, when he came from the war front to Lagos. Maybe seeing those in Lagos who did not go to the war front owning real estates in posh areas of Lagos, while he had none, he probably tried to catch up with them.

However, Adekunle came back (from this second trip to Lagos) after another three weeks stay without bringing even a pin, and not even a bag of rice or *gari*. We were all very shocked and disappointed. Adekunle called for a meeting for the next day. On the whole, he had stayed 51 days in Lagos, all on the pretext of getting supplies as he did before we started our advance from Calabar where all stores were filled to the brim and we had no room for storage. Almost all of us panicked, because we had thought that the Biafrans would surely counterattack, and maybe start an invasion. I went to Adekunle's house that night, and he said that he needed to rest and we should meet at the next day's meeting scheduled for 10.00a.m. That was an unusual attitude of him to me. I thought, however, that he actually needed rest. He granted TV and radio interviews in Lagos and exaggerated everything he did and what he did not do. He was finding it difficult to manage success.

Then Akinrinade, Ayo Ariyo, Aliyu, Eromobor, Shande and Okwarobo the artillery officer came to my place to discuss

what should happen next, and how to face expected Biafran counter-attack if and when they did. We sat down all night planning and discussing what was expected from Biafrans and how to counter same. All we were doing was to be ready for the usual debate with the commander the next day at the scheduled meeting.

When he came into the meeting at 10:00a.m. for which all the officers concerned were seated at 9.45a.m., we all stood up and applauded for about five minutes, with everyone smiling broadly, shouting and hailing the black scorpion. We then got seated for the business of the day.

As usual, we came up with our maps ready for the usual debate. Then Adekunle came up with the bombshell. He had been told in Lagos that he had too many Yoruba people at his HQ and in 3MCDO as a whole, and that he was going to reorganise the division. As he said that, all eyes turned to me as if I had fore-knowledge of what the commander was talking about, and that I did not inform them. I was more shocked than all of them. I could not look at anybody in the eye. I looked down throughout the commander's statements. He did not congratulate the officers and men for a job well done, that Port Harcourt was captured before the Kampala Conference which was the reason for the speed and the hurry, the restless days and the sleepless nights, and the results we achieved. I had offended most of these officers by pushing them so hard during the 30-day advance, leading to the capture of Port Harcourt. He also did not brief us about the outcome of the Kampala Conference for which we worked extra hard.

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Emotional upheavals in 3MCDO

The end had justified the means. We had achieved our objective and the aim of establishing the Rivers State Government on the ground with its HQ at Port Harcourt. Akinrinade had cleared all the towns in the riverine areas of Rivers State of Biafran presence. Papa Graham-Douglas, who later became the Chief judge of Rivers State was brought back to Port Harcourt, as were Saro-Wiwa, Napo Douglas, the musician Rex Lawson and Mr. Fine Country. Many more were brought out from their hiding places to Port Harcourt to start the new government of the Rivers State. Within days, Saro-Wiwa had started a civil defence organisation for the defence of the towns and to ensure that Biafrans did not infiltrate Port Harcourt, and the riverine areas. That was helpful indeed, and I went to see some of his organisations on ground. A joint patrol with our military police was set up at places. All hands were on deck, as people came out in hundreds to volunteer one job or the other. Saro-Wiwa went to Bonny Island with two lady scouts, but their boat capsized and the two ladies drowned, while he swam back to Port Harcourt the same night.

What had happened was that, while Adekunle went back to Lagos on Tuesday May 21st, 1968 with the world press, he granted interview to the press. When asked where next would be his target having done so well with his marine commando division that had captured almost everywhere; and having liberated two states (the South-eastern State and Rivers State)? Adekunle's answer was that he would capture and give Owerri, Aba and Umuahia (OAU) as Independence Day, October 1st 1968 celebration gift, to General Gowon and the people of Nigeria. Well, that was not a problem, if that was what the commander wanted, but we just had to get the supplies and the reinforcements needed and then plan for it and move on. That was how he ended the first meeting with his officers who advanced, fought, got shot, carried dead and dying comrades, had no food, drank

blood-reddened water, had cold, dysentery, malaria and blisters on their feet on the way to Port Harcourt. The meeting lasted only 15 minutes! The commander, Adekunle, then informed us that we would all hear from him shortly and that we should all get back to our offices and stations. The shock was total. What a day that was! In the presence of all the officers, I was almost in tears when I turned to Adekunle and said, "These officers and men have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave us to do, and I pray that God in His mercy will reward you and us accordingly." I was thinking of the words in the Holy Book, *John 17 v 4*.

All the officers trooped to me, wanting to know what was happening. My answer was simple. I told them that perhaps he had a rough time in Lagos, and did not get what he went for, which could be frustrating in itself. But the OAU situation without reinforcements and supplies also troubled me. Usually, these things happen to very happy people that probably won a lottery, when pressmen would ask questions about what they would do with their money and about their new status? Invariably, because such people are drunk with victory and unable to maintain a sense of reality they make unguarded statements, but it is no more considered an unguarded statement when he starts to implement such statements. In the meantime, all the Biafran POWs that advanced to Port Harcourt with us were leaving and going home to Biafra and that depleted the various sectors a lot. However, that was also expected and was not a surprise any more. All these had been discussed and the answers we had were based only on our strategically located reserves. We even had more reserves than advancing troops, as we expected a massive counter-attack. All these assumptions and expectations were correct so far except that the supplies expected from the commander's first and second trips to Lagos did not arrive. Then of course, the question

that worried us; what did the Yoruba people do wrong? He did not have to say all that during his first meeting with us after 51 days absence, during which results were achieved with lots of effort and sacrifice. Everybody had worked their hearts out to achieve results from Lt. Cols. Ayo-Ariyo, Akinrinade, Alimi Ogunkanmi, Maj. Makanjuola, Capt. Akinyanju, Capt. Salawu, Capt. Ladipo, Captains/Engr. Olajire, Capt./Engr Oladejobi, Engr. Bayo Onadeko, Capt. Gbadamosi King of the air force, and others. What was expected of them that they did not do? The only officer that died on the advance besides Isaac Boro at Okrika was a Yorubaman - Captain Fashola. Well, I just withdrew into my shell to avoid knowing what was going on and why it happened. I just advised all the officers to remain calm and await the commander's reorganisation plan. I must re-emphasise here that, to say that everybody was disappointed and downcast, is an understatement. Even if the Yoruba people in the division had, in anyway, disappointed Adekunle, (which was not true anyway), and at any time, was that the right forum and time for such a statement?

That is what the military call MANAGEMENT (How to manage MEN and TIME...Manage ..Men.. And...T. Time). Who were these Yoruba people, and what did they do wrong? Twenty-one days earlier, we were together talking, laughing, and shaking hands. Where and when did things go wrong? We all searched our consciences, and we did not see anything we did wrong, so we resigned to the usual poor man's prayer, let the Lord judge, and "*God dey.*"

Just as we were all so downcast from Adekunle's bombshell, Kunle Elegbede reported from Calabar that Biafrans had broken through Ikot Okpora, captured it and were heading for Odukpani about 50 kilometres or so north of Calabar, the seat of the new government of the South-eastern State. The

counter-plan for that was for Lt. Col. Obeya with 18 Brigade at Itu to counter-attack while the battalion with Capt. Ekpo at Ugep would attack from the rear of the Biafran forces in a double envelopment. The usual thing was that, all the staff officers -including Alabi-Isama and Akinrinade would rush to such a place and get the job done, but in this case, nobody budged. Adekunle then called me for the last time as his Chief of Staff to brief Lt. Col. Godwin Ally who had just been transferred to 3MCDO and to hand over to him, and that I was transferred to 3 Sector at Uyo with 12 Brigade, 13 Brigade, and 18 Brigade under my command stretching from Imo River to the west to Cross River to the east. The reorganisation had started.

The re-organisation of 3MCDO

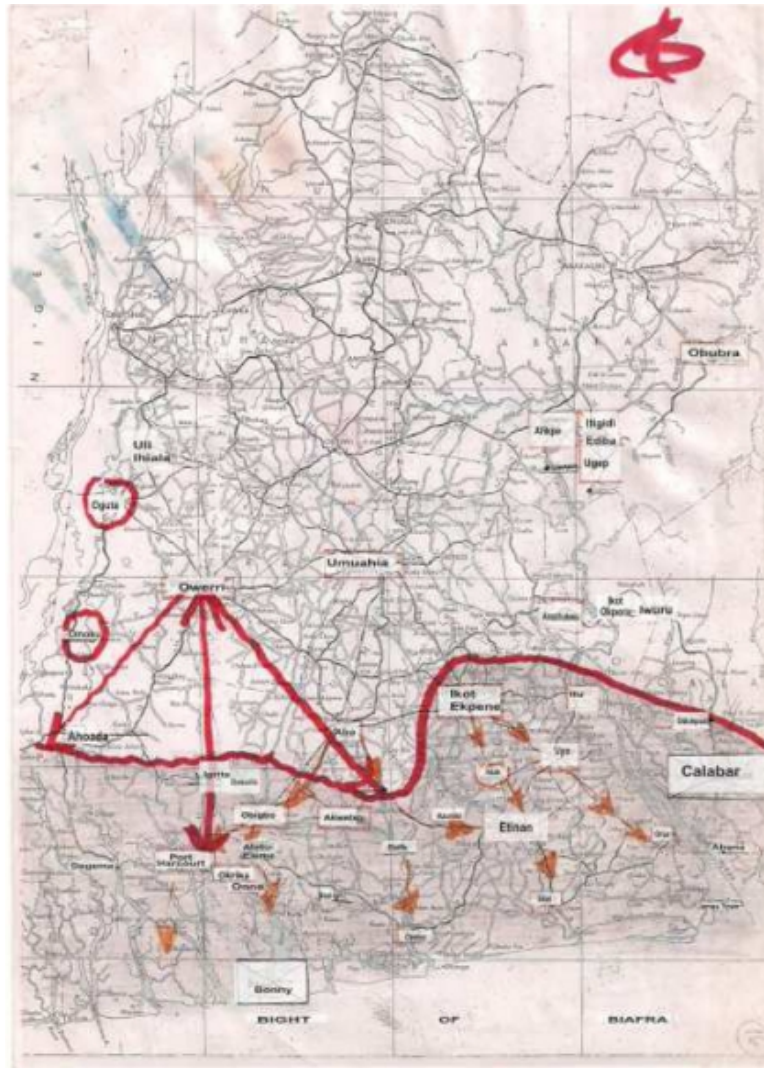
Every officer was waiting for the new postings, especially Akinrinade and I. Any posting out of headquarters meant good sleep and rest for us, as we only had to concentrate on our sectors alone. That was easy. However, because of the situation that was developing in the Calabar sector, Ayo Ariyo was posted to Calabar to command the garrison there. In the meantime, all other postings were on hold. So, I moved away from Port Harcourt that same day to 13 Brigade HQ at Uyo, and within the same week, Ayo Ariyo moved to Calabar. I went to Ayo Ariyo in Calabar to help with the counter-attack against enemy incursions into his sector. It took a week and then all was quiet and stabilised. Since he was on my right flank, we agreed to work out a defence strategy for the two sectors. Ayo Ariyo was Sector 4 commander with his HQ at Calabar.

Chapter Eleven

OAU AND THE DEATH OF SHANDE

While other officers were waiting for their postings, Akinrinade remained as GSOL (General Staff Officer) at 3MCDO HQ at Port Harcourt, and Lt. Col. Philemon Shande was ordered to attack Aba within seven days. So, after studying his map and the conditions of his troops, he gave his requirement list to the commander, (Col. Benjamin Adekunle) and requested to discuss the details with him. When Adekunle was not listening, he requested to discuss with Akinrinade and I at my new HQ at Uyo. He arrived at about 6.00p.m. Akinrinade had arrived earlier at about 4.00p.m. He did not tell me what the meeting was about as we spoke on the operational radio. When Akinrinade arrived, he then briefed me on what was happening at the 3MCDO HQ and Shande's orders to attack Aba. We discussed all night even without dinner. We discussed the details and the tactics, but he had less than 350 men left in his brigade because the Biafran POWs that were with his brigade had left. He did not have casualties during the advance to Port Harcourt, but many of his troops like the others were hospitalised for dysentery, cholera and malaria, not gunshot wounds. 3MCDO positions as held at Ahoada, Igrita and Ikot-Ineme before the OAU plan were about 150 kilometres equidistant. It would definitely be difficult to defend the whole area after capture, as we would then be in core Iboland and every metre of the land must be occupied, or there would be many infiltrators between our positions. Adekunle unfortunately, did not see it that way.

All the same, Shande's men of 17 Brigade were battle-ready but definitely not enough for the attack into core Iboland and also not enough to hold it, with Owerri to his left and Umuahia to the right.



Map of OCAU Plan.

I, therefore, opted to advance for eight kilometres to help with his right flank on Azumini River to enable him enter Aba without having to bother about his right flank. All these were coordinated. He then went back to Port Harcourt to discuss his requirement list with Adekunle. Well, Adekunle told him that he could do it, and capture Aba with the troops he had. When Shande continued to complain and his arguments became louder, Adekunle called him a coward.

Shande then sent me a note that Adekunle called him a coward and that he would go ahead and attack and will not need 13 Brigade at his right flank anymore as had been planned. The note was sent to Uyo at my HQ but I was at Azumini with my troops preparing to support his advance into Aba as I had promised to advance to Aba on his right flank as soon as he would let me have the details of his attack plan. So, I did not receive the note.



*Lt. Col. Philemon Shande, 17 Brigade Commander
3MCDO died at Aba.*

Shande just took his troops and advanced, capturing Aba on September 4th 1968 and did not coordinate with me anymore. I broke his radio silence and called him. He asked if I received his note to me which he sent to Uyo, "Negative" I said. Then he said that Adekunle called him a coward and he told him that he was not a coward and went for the attack. Just, about an hour or so after talking with me on the radio, he continued with the attack and was shot dead, with

an enemy bullet straight through his steel helmet and into his forehead. He was killed instantly.

3MCDO went into flames. Lt. Col. Philemon Shande was a Tiv man from Benue, and more than fifty per cent of our men were from Benue but it was only then we realised that most of them had monitored his complaints and his command and control situation on the radio. There were protests everywhere. Lt. Col. Godwin Ally, the new Chief of Staff (from Ogoja) and Lt. Col. Obeya (from Benue) had to go round the units to talk to Benue troops of Benue origin. 3MCDO was in trouble and it took over two weeks to settle the situation. His troops of 17 Brigade withdrew to Obigbo where they started from. Most of his troops from Benue deserted and so did the Benue troops from most of the other units. Shande was our friend and a classmate of Akinrinade and I. We mourned him deeply and kept away from Adekunle as much as we could.

Then, as was usual, whenever the division was in trouble somewhere, Akinrinade and I would be sought out to solve the problem, but that was when we were the staff officers at the 3MCDO HQ. In this case, I was already transferred to 3 Sector at Uyo, and Akinrinade was the GSOL in Port Harcourt.



Akinrinade recaptured Aba, October 4th, 1968.



A walk into Aba after it has been captured. A ghost town.

Therefore, Akinrinade was available, and was then ordered to take over Aba sector where Shande had just been killed and also to have 17 Brigade as part of his sector. So Akinrinade was now Sector 2 Commander, with his sector stretching from Imo River to the west, right up to Azumini River to the east. The sector was hot, with new troops deserting, and low morale everywhere after Shande's death. This was the same 17 Brigade that was two days ahead of

the main body during the 30-day advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt. Shande died, but he proved that he was not a coward. I later saw the note that he sent to me at Uyo the night before he died. I confronted Adekunle about the situation but it made no difference. We had lost Shande. From this incident on, Adekunle and I drifted miles apart, and our relationship soured.

When Akinrinade took over the sector, 17 Brigade that was Shande's former brigade, was left with less than 100 men. So, 250 troops from Ayo Ariyo in Calabar and another 250 troops from Uyo and my 12 Brigade at Azumini were placed under the command of Akinrinade. Within a few weeks, Akinrinade had reorganised the brigade to the original fighting team that it used to be. He started retraining, and by Friday the 4th of October, 1968, Akinrinade had recaptured Aba and stabilised his position with his HQ at Asa. Officers from other units came to help him in the attack. This was usual with 3MCDO.

By the 10th day of October, 1968, all our sectors, 2 Sector commanded by Akinrinade, 3 Sector commanded by me and 4 Sector commanded by Ayo Ariyo had stabilised. Our three positions planned an alliance strategy that an attack on one was an attack on the other, and we must assist as much as we could and until the civil war ended, no Biafran troops ever tried again or came close to these three sectors for a counter-attack. No Biafran troops ever attacked these sectors and went back alive. 1 Sector, under the command of Godwin Ally and the know-it-all team that thought they were champions finally realised that they were not as capable as they thought. When all their plans failed, then they turned as usual, to either Alabi-Isama or Akinrinade.



Officers went to help Akinrinade at Aba: From right - Lt. Col. Adebiyi, Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo, Lt. Col. Aliyu and others.



3MCDO's attack on Oguta

As part of the OAU independence gift to General Gowon and to Nigeria and Nigerian people, Oguta was ordered to be attacked by Adekunle. Major Mekanjuola was ordered to attack Oguta on a two-pronged attack operation, by road with two battalions and by the river up through Orashi River with a battalion from Ahoada. As part of the intelligence report reaching us, Oguta hosted part of the crippled Biafran Navy but nothing else. The two battalions by road and the one battalion sailing up Orashi River were to rendezvous at Mgbidi, a town east of Orlu and north of Owerri. Looking at the map, we realised that the piecemeal attack and advance into Ibo heartland would be suicidal. Everybody kept away unless he was called or ordered. At this time, Sector 1 was formed, commanded by newly arrived Lt. Col. Godwin Ally, whose units included Aliyu's Special Force, 14 Brigade commanded by Eromobor (later by George Innih), and 16

Brigade commanded by Major Utuk. Attack on Oguta was, therefore, part of Sector 1 operation.

Lt. Col. Ally did not discuss the tactics or the strategy behind it, nor did he listen to the commanders of the troops concerned. They had no maps, there was no specific aim for wanting to capture these towns except for capturing sake. There was no intelligence report on enemy positions, their strength, and possible gaps in-between their defences. They took things for granted.



Maj. Makanjuola commanded Oguta troops.

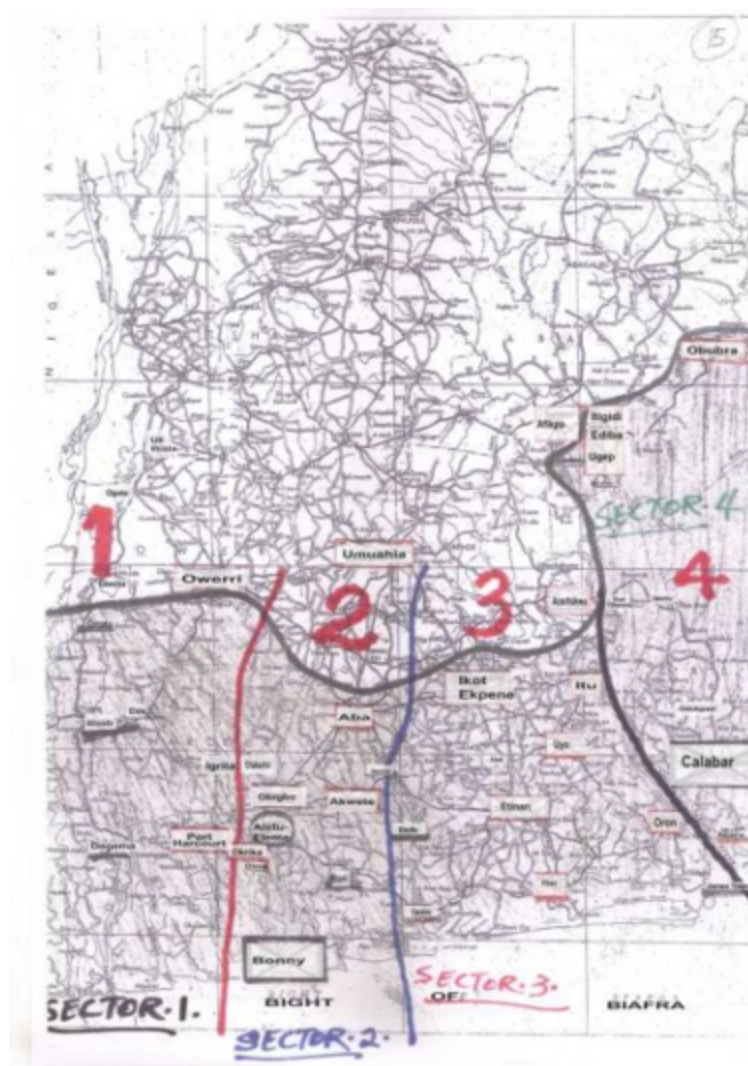
Major Makanjuola complained about not having enough troops and heavy weapons for the attack into Ibo heartland, and that most of his troops were still recuperating from the Calabar to Port Harcourt operation, but he was talked down. All Lt. Col. Godwin Ally said was that Oguta could be captured as part of the left flank operation for Owerri. Akinrinade went to warn Adekunle that we should learn from what happened at Aba, where Shande died. Then Adekunle

retorted that Akinrinade had since captured the town and was holding it. Adekunle was warned that the situation and experience were not the same. But Godwin Ally was senior to Akinrinade and myself and thought that if Akinrinade could capture Aba, and Alabi-Isama could capture Ikot Ekpene, and Ayo Ariyo could capture Ikot Okpora and stabilise Calabar, why could he not capture Owerri and Oguta? We returned to the usual debate and insisted that Oguta and Owerri were too close to Uli-Ihiala, which, as at that time, was Biafra's centre of gravity. Adekunle was scornful of Clausewitz's centre of gravity concept which he thought was theory, not tactics. So, I quietly left and so did Akinrinade. All Godwin Ally and Innih said to Adekunle was, "Yes sir", while Utuk and Makanjuola looked on; and they went into the attack. As expected, Major Makanjuola got to Oguta and held the town for a day or two but on the night of September 8th, he was, with his troops, thrown into the Orashi River like the 2 Division's landing operations at Asaba when Nigerian troops were thrown into the River Niger.

At this time, I did not want to have anything to do with it; nor did Ayo Ariyo. We foresaw all these disasters befalling our dear 3MCDO. Akinrinade was asked by Ayo Ariyo and me to go to Adekunle once again, to let us go back to the drawing board and plan afresh on how to handle the attack on the Ibo heartland. When Akinrinade got to Adekunle in Port Harcourt, he was already planning the attack on Owerri, even as the news of the Oguta disaster was coming in. By the 10th of September 1968, it was clear that 3MCDO had lost Oguta and all the troops withdrew as far back as to Ahoada. Sector 1 operation area extended from Orashi River to the west and Imo River to the east. 3MCDO had started to fight like the Biafrans and there was no way we could beat them in conventional warfare. We needed something more

than the ordinary to beat the Biafran officers. Godwin Ally had fought in the Midwest but was new to 3MCDO.

They had heard the wonderful stories of the prowess and the invincibility of Adekunle and his 3MCDO. They thought that the operations were as easy as they sounded. They finally found out otherwise. We had to come up with something better than their mediocre stuff. It was what was needed to succeed. Major Makanjuola, the 15 Brigade Commander, was even lost for seven days before he showed up. Thus, for the first time in the historic battles of 3MCDO, we lost a town that we could not re-enter.



Map of 3MCDO reorganised into four sectors by Adekunle 1969.

The attack on Owerri

By the time Akinrinade, as GSOI went to warn Adekunle about this type of piecemeal conventional warfare, Adekunle had already called Major Utuk and ordered him to be prepared to capture Owerri before or by September 16th, 1968, and not later than 16.00p.m. He was promoted field Lieutenant Colonel and asked to take over 16 brigade where he was earlier the brigade major. So he knew the situation of the troops on the ground. But this young officer could not say no, or at best, try to explain the situation of his brigade on the ground.

The 16 Brigade to be commanded by Lt. Col. Utuk was the brigade commanded by Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo that captured Oron, Eket, Opobo and as point brigade into Port Harcourt. This was the same brigade that captured the airport in Port Harcourt and what they called Biafran Airways. This was an experienced brigade and so was Major Utuk himself. Major Innih was then to take over 14 Brigade. Both Utuk and Innih were brigade majors of their respective brigades for envelopment and ambush and served with me at Uyo during the advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt. I was thus interested in these two officers and their operations. They had both served with me brilliantly right from 1964, when I was their company commander at 4th Battalion at Ibadan before the war, until late in 1965.

Akinrinade then told Adekunle that capturing Owerri was not the problem, but holding it, and that since the Biafrans were then left in a small area, there would be heavy casualties in any attack into their heartland, with very short turn-around for reinforcement, and counter-attack, as they will put all they have got into defending the town, moreso with Biafra's new airport just next door, less than 30 kilometres away. Adekunle refused all the points made by Akinrinade and ordered the attack. The troops of 16 Brigade were to take on Owerri frontally through Ohoba, Obinze and

into Owerri from Elele. 14 Brigade then commanded by Major George Innih was to attack from the right flank of Utuk through Amala to Olakwo and to rendezvous at Inyiogugu, a town east of Owerri on Owerri-Umuahia road. The remnants of 15 Brigade and the reserve we had kept for Port Harcourt defence were put together including Aliyu's Special Force to look after Utuk's left flank by advancing through Omoku, Awara, Asa into Obigwe, a town West of Owerri.

Akinrinade led the frontal attack of 16 Brigade into Owerri after 48 hours of fighting on Monday September 16th, 1968 at 12.00 p.m. He radioed me that he had captured Owerri with 16 Brigade. Major Alimi Ogunkanmi was shot through the spine, and was paralysed right away. He also lost a lot of blood. He was brought back to Port Harcourt Delta Hospital and from there to the Military Hospital in Lagos. Major Alimi Ogunkanmi never walked again and remained in a wheel chair for the rest of his life. Akinrinade went back to Port Harcourt to brief Adekunle on what had happened and Adekunle said, "You see, we can capture Owerri." Well, we were not talking of capturing but staying there to defend it.



Major Alimi Ogunkanmi, first from right, paralysed six days after this picture was taken in September 1968. From left: Alabi-Isama, Akinrinade, Adekunle, Ally and Ogunkanmi at Port Harcourt.

In the meantime, the new 15 Brigade came under the command of Yemi Alabi, but soon, Yemi had to go to Lagos Military Hospital for he still had a bullet stuck inside his head which had not been removed. Yemi Alabi is blind as this book goes to press.



Lt.Col. Yemi Alabi seated first from right at the Port Harcourt victory party, 18 May, 1968, with a bullet stuck in his head. He is blind today. Behind Yemi Alabi is Bayo Alugbin of Nigerian Police.

So, the new 15 Brigade was then commanded by Major Iluyomade. While Akinrinade led Utuk's 16 Brigade into Owerri, Iluyomade could not go beyond Asa to the west of Owerri before getting bogged down and so Utuk's left flank was exposed for a distance of about 50 kilometres from Owerri to Ahoada. Also to the right with Innih's 14 Brigade, they too could not reach their objective at Inyilogugu, so for another 30 kilometres or more, and up to Imo River, Utuk's right flank was also exposed. Utuk was, therefore, left alone with his 16 Brigade inside Owerri. It was only a matter of time before the unit collapsed. What was 3MCDO's aim of attacking Owerri if not for the ego of its commander at play! Sometimes, what you want may not be necessary and in most cases may not be what you need. Many more died on both sides. They did not have the records of the dead. Who cared, and who was going to ask? The letter to the next of kin (NOK) of dead soldiers was never used.

The worst part was that Godwin Ally, the sector commander was still in Port Harcourt at 3MCDO HQ, some

300 kilometres away, and about five hours drive from the war front. He did not lead the attack either and had no command post close to his sector.



Utuk in centre with the survivors of Owerri siege out of 1,500 troops. Capt. Buhari, his new deputy, is on his right.



Utuk and the rest of his men out of Owerri, April 1969.

It was not Akinrinade's sector, he only wanted to help and to make his point that capturing Owerri was not the problem, but holding it due to its proximity to Uli-Ihiala, which we then had identified as Biafra's new centre of gravity.

The usual thing with 3MCDO, was for the sector HQ to move up with its advancing troops for command and control, since most of our troops were newly-recruited locals and had very little battle experience, while most of their officers were non-commissioned men who were corporals, sergeants and sergeant-majors before the war and were given commissions on the battlefield for their gallantry and effective command and control ability. An example of this was Capt. Buhari, who later became the Brigade Major of 16 Brigade and performed creditably throughout the war. He was a non-commissioned officer (NCO). Others were Capts. Gagara, Musa Wamba, Olatubosun and Haruna of 13 Brigade, who performed wonderfully with me in every operation. He was lucky that more than fifty per cent of these men had seen action before

and some were part of the advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt in May 1968.

So, with Iluyomade's 15 Brigade withdrawal to the left and Innih's 14 Brigade withdrawal to the right, all Utuk's wings had been clipped but his 16 Brigade held on for about seven months, from 16th September 1968 until 28th April 1969. For seven months, the entire Biafran Army could not dislodge Utuk from Owerri — it was incredible! He dispersed his troops in an all-round defence, back to back, and in depth, with each section of about ten men with its own ammunition and was very independent and ready for battle. The brigade like each one, had a platoon of fifty snipers already trained from Calabar and attached for special operations during the advance to Port Harcourt. There was no way anyone would have dislodged them until they all died one by one. So there was a stalemate. For seven months, 16th Commando Brigade led by Utuk never surrendered. Biafra thus tied down majority of its troops against Utuk's 16 Brigade at Owerri which allowed I Division to easily capture Umuahia in April, 1969.



3MCDO special forces training before the advance on Port Harcourt.

Biafra recaptures Owerri

The Biafran successes at Aba and Oguta must have boosted their morale and given them the added impetus to attack Owerri because by September 16th, 1968 when Owerri was captured by 16 Brigade commanded then by Lt. Col. Utuk, Oguta had just been recaptured by Biafrans a week before. The twin events of the withdrawal of George Innih's brigade to the right and Iluyomade's brigade to the left added a lot to Utuk's problems of holding the town. Therefore, Utuk sent his 44 Battalion to Owerri-Aba-Umuahia road which was expected to be held by Innih's brigade, and he sent another, 33 Battalion to Owerri-Okigwe road which Iluyomade was to hold at his left flank, and his third battalion which was the 2nd Commando Battalion was to look after Ohoba-Oguta road. I was at Uyo grinding my teeth in annoyance at the way Owerri operation was being handled.

Well, if the two brigades under Iluyomade and Innih failed to get to their objectives and Utuk did, why could the two brigades not pass through Utuk at Owerri to get to their objectives? Owerri itself should not have been attacked in the first place without a proper plan, but having done that, there was no reason to cry over spilt milk. We needed to think rationally and come up with a proper counter-attack plan. However, what was not acceptable was that the two other brigades and their sector commander, Godwin Ally did not know what to do, rather they kept requesting for more troops and ammunition, particularly George Innih, while Utuk bore the brunt of the entire operation. Adekunle was also there watching them, until we heard that he had gone to Lagos again.

Lt. Col. Utuk held on regardless. He was in touch with me at least twice a week and when his situation became desperate with the Biafrans attacking in waves, he was advised to spread out in sections of not more than 10, while each section would be independent with its ammunition and food. The doctor and the paramedics would still be centralised and he should not give up. Then we asked how long he could hold on, to which he said, “forever” as long as his ammunition and food were supplied. I let him know of a plan at hand to relieve him of pressure.

The story of Owerri touched me seriously because this man had been my officer since 1964/65. I knew him well, as much as I also knew George Innih. They both served under me as platoon commanders at 4th Battalion in Ibadan in 1964/65 before the 1966 coup. I was angry with Innih for not linking up with Utuk and since linking up with him was difficult and Utuk was inside Owerri already, he could pass through Utuk’s 2nd Battalion holding Ohoba on Owerri-Oguta road and cut off the Biafrans holding him up in front at their rear. Innih was angry with me for telling him to go back into Owerri when his commanders — Godwin Ally and

Adekunle did not tell him to do so. He was right; I rested my case.

While the situation got worse, the Biafrans could not dislodge 16 Brigade at Owerri, so Utuk started what we called *“one man, one shot, Tapa Igangan training.”* Under Lt. Col. Abogo Largema, our battalion commanding officer at Ibadan, we had practised how to survive siege at a place called “Tapa Igangan” at Igbo-Ora near Abeokuta in 1964-65. So, he spread out accordingly. His snipers were simply wonderful, they were spread out as advised and gave Biafran troops hell on earth. It was one shot, one down.

But by the end of October 1968, Utuk was running short of ammunition and food and some of his troops that were shot in critical parts of their bodies bled to death right in front of the others. Their morale was very low indeed. The Biafran troops that could not dislodge him and his troops from Owerri since September then decided to go round the town and block his supply route from Port Harcourt. Anytime he spoke with me, he asked of his parents at Ikot Ekpene since I was then the commander of the sector. I set up a radio contact in my war room some 300 kilometres away as a direct link with him on a different frequency from 3MCDO HQ or Sector 1 HQ both at Port Harcourt. His sector HQ and 3MCDO HQ were collecting all available troops; be they cooks, military police or stewards to reinforce him at Owerri. Most of them could not stand the situation and started to desert. Many shot themselves in the foot or hand to be able to get away from the front. The sector was in real trouble but Utuk could still not be dislodged by Biafran troops.

By November 1968, air drop of food and ammunition became necessary, and were sent to him since the Biafrans had set up ambushes to snatch his supplies from his brigade quartermaster (QM) coming from Port Harcourt. His situation had gone from worse to critical. The air force did not have

the experience of air drop, so, most of the supplies ended up in the hands of Biafrans. Again, why did the jet fighters not escort the DC3 supply flights into Owerri? Were they incapable of close air support? There was incompetence everywhere, and no one could think out a solution to these simple problems. The food drop plan was aborted. This situation went on until April 1969 when he (Utuk) decided to break out of Owerri. Utuk never surrendered.

It was at this stage that I called Akinrinade to my HQ at Uyo from his HQ at Asa and told him that all the 3MCDO HQ and Sector 1 HQ were doing was to reinforce failure. The situation at Owerri was not the type that needed reinforcement, and in my view it was not so difficult a situation as such. As things stood, 3MCDO was fighting conventional warfare just like Biafra was doing. Well, when it came to debating strategy and tactics, I trusted Akinrinade more than discussing with Godwin Ally, the sector commander who was in trouble, and was having difficulties dealing with it. Further, since he was senior to Akinrinade and I, all our points were never taken happily anytime we discussed with him. We told him that the situation had nothing to do with seniority, but of war experience and the lives of these troops that we all loved and advanced from Calabar to Port Harcourt together with, without casualties, and that we could call many of them by name to show how close we were to these men.

The Pincer Strategy

My suggested strategy was, first for the Sector HQ to move forward to Ohoba nearer the beleaguered 16 Brigade immediately, then to start what I called Operations Pincer 1, 2 or 3, one of which will not only relieve 16 Brigade of pressure but end the war at the same time. However, we had to realise that Uli-Ihiala was the most important part of Biafra at that time. So, I invited Akinrinade to my Uyo HQ to

discuss the “Pincer Strategy” after which Akinrinade and I went to discuss with Ayo Ariyo in Calabar, but Ariyo was no more interested. He led us into Port Harcourt during the 30-day advance, he held Port Harcourt until Adekunle returned finally to the war front. He was completely frustrated like most of us.



Akinrinade (Left) and I studying Operation Pincer maps at my Uyo HQ 1969.

We were not sure of what was inside the house; maybe it was even bugged. So, we came outside to discuss and to study the map. However, Ayo Ariyo listened to the plans, the strategy and the tactics of Operations Pincer 1, 2 and 3. He made some corrections and adjustments to the plans, and reminded me that all these had been discussed before we left Calabar a year ago, since April 1968, and only needed some adjustments, as the situation had changed. He was right, and he also told us that he had trained another 200 recruits that could be made available. I also had about 250 and Akinrinade another 250 recruits who were trained

locally. Our three sectors were solid and had not seen or experienced any Biafran counter-attack since they were routed in our sectors at Aba, Ikot Ekpene and Calabar. We intensified training in all respects; from drivers' training to medical, first aid, weapons training, sniper training, artillery and mortar training.

We sent long range patrols, and plotted all known Biafran troops positions, defences, their re-supply routes, including obstacles en-route Uli-Ihiala which was the centre of gravity of Biafra's war effort at that time. Only Sector 1 had problems which were of its own making. It was just blunder. Any new reinforcements sent to Sector 1 merely fizzled away into Ohoba/Owerri road, just to die or be wounded. The hospitals were filled up at Port Harcourt with Owerri front casualties. The situation needed a new plan, tactics and strategy, not conventional brutal methods that got so many dead, especially in a situation where we could have defeated the Biafrans mentally before they were defeated physically.

Death of Major Ted Hamman at Owerri

Major Ted Hamman was the brigade major, and deputy to Utuk at Owerri. I had gone on attack with him at Opobo and during our entry into Aletu Eleme. I first met this fine, tall officer in Enugu in 1964 when we went for a shooting competition at 1 Battalion before the war. He had just met his wife, Nelly, and we went out together, and I was well entertained. We became very friendly and got along well with each other. We met again in Calabar during the advance to capture Odukpani junction some 40 kilometres north of Calabar. Ted Hamman was from Maiduguri in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. He loved discussing tactics and strategy with me. He joined the Nigerian Army in 1962 and attended NMTC at Kaduna which I attended in 1960. He also attended the same cadet school I attended in the UK.

Commissioned in 1964, he was a course mate of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and Mamman Jiya Vatsa.

On Saturday April 12th, 1969, Ted's wife, Nelly, came to see me at my Sector HQ at Uyo from Calabar to tell me that she dreamt of her husband's death. As a matter of fact, she was sure that he had died. I told her that it was not true because I spoke with him and Utuk that morning. I took her to my war room and she spoke on the radio, with her husband who promised to come to Uyo and see her on Wednesday April 16th, 1969. On Wednesday, Ted Hamman called again on the radio that the situation was not quite good for him to come out and that by Saturday 19th April, he should make every effort to come and see her, but she was still crying on the radio. Hamman then decided to come out on Friday 18th April. He ran into an ambush, and was shot along Owerri-Ohoba road. His escorts took him back to Owerri and after two days of nonstop bleeding, he died Sunday morning of April 20th, 1969. It was a disaster for all of us.



Ted Hamman, (right), and Alabi-Isama ready to go on patrol.



My first patrol with Ted Hamman (first right) at Opobo in April 1968. Alabi-Isama is second right.

Nelly wept uncontrollably and I could not hide my tears either. Why did 3MCDO attack Owerri? It was all because of one man's ego — to give General Gowon a gift for the October 1st, 1968 Independence Day celebrations. We could not achieve that; instead Adekunle lost his myth of being invincible, and lost more than fifty per cent of the brigade, including Ted Hamman. That again was the problem of leaders who would not examine all options before taking action on a subject. The troops that died on both sides were children of some people somewhere. Theirs were avoidable deaths.



Escorting Mrs. Hamman back to Calabar by ferry from Oron, Tuesday April 22nd, 1969. From right: Mrs. Nelly Hamman, Lt. Col. Abubakar, Maj. Sunny Tuoyo, Lt. Col. Alabi-Isama, and Capt. Omoniyi.

Utuk's 16 Brigade breaks out of Owerri

Lt. Col. Utuk's decision to break out of Owerri was for three reasons. *Firstly*, the death of Ted Hamman on the 20th of April, 1969, completely demoralised him and the rest of his troops. *Secondly*, on the 19th of April, Ted Hamman had been shot and was bleeding profusely, with little or no help

in sight, and the air drop for that day also failed as the Biafrans had acquired some anti-aircraft guns, and had a go at the DC-3 bringing supplies. The pilot was shot at and just managed to get back to base at Port Harcourt. Capt. Mokonogo was a well-trained, fine pilot who flew a DC-3 during the war, bringing supplies from Lagos to Calabar airport before the 30-day advance to Port Harcourt. He also helped in posting troops' letters, written at the war front, in Lagos. So then, since the supplies were not dropped, and the jet fighters could not escort the supply flight into Owerri, then it would be difficult to drop subsequent ones, Utuk thought. *Finally*, Utuk knew about Operations Pincer 1,2 and 3, as he was with me throughout the planning stages. He also commanded a brigade with me to attack Ugep, Itigidi, Ediba and Obubra back in February/March 1968 from Calabar, before the Port Harcourt advance. He was one of our best.

When I went to Adekunle to offer my help, I suggested that the situation at Owerri could be salvaged with little effort. I reminded him of the Battle of the Bulge during World War II. He listened attentively, and when I had finished, he wrote on my map: "Thank you for tactics lesson ONE, when do I expect more tuition?" I had told Utuk that I was going to Adekunle to discuss details of how to relieve him of pressure. When I left Adekunle and got to my HQ at Uyo, I told Akinrinade and Ayo Ariyo what happened at Port Harcourt. Ayo Ariyo said that it served me right. When Utuk called me, I only told him that the 3MCDO HQ was working on it. He asked if I was coming and I said no. He just dropped the radio and in exactly seven days, Utuk was out of Owerri.

It was very amazing that despite all the noise about Biafran troops surrounding Owerri, Utuk came out intact without surrendering to anybody, with all his belongings but all of us from Port Harcourt to Elele and Igrita and Ahoada could not reach him. Something was wrong somewhere.

What was wrong? I can say with hindsight that it was ego, nothing more and nothing less! The war had become personalised and Adekunle's myth started to burst like soap bubble. It was empty anyway to start with, without his officers and men but he probably did not remember that. Should you really bite the fingers that feed you?

All of us, including Akinrinade, warned Adekunle that while we could capture anywhere at anytime, the Ibo heartland required more than just an attack. We needed to capture and hold places captured. But I did not think anyone needed to tell Adekunle all these. It was too elementary for a Sandhurst graduate. What was the use of a captured place that one could not hold?

Well, this is interesting because a brigade beleaguered from November 1968 to April 1969 was able to infiltrate back to his HQ at Ohoba, carrying with him his wounded, his equipment, his dead deputy, Major Ted Hamman and all his refugees and POWs, but his HQ could not reach him inside Owerri! That needed a board of inquiry but those concerned were too involved with each other to be bothered.

The Holy Bible explained it in *Proverbs 24 v 6*. Akinrinade disagreed with his 2 Division commander at Asaba on how not to cross the River Niger, and for that he was sacked. In the military, what not to do, and where not to go are more important than what to do and where to go. They knew Akinrinade was right after all, regarding the Asaba debacle, but only after many had died. But we were not looking for who was right or wrong, which is why in the military we have what we call "O Group." In short, two heads are better than one; but they have to be two good heads. So, Utuk broke out of Owerri and Adekunle recoiled into his shell. Adekunle had lost his first battle at the height of his glory. What was that, *Karma* or *Kismet*?

We all saw that Adekunle was troubled, but what the trouble was, he did not say and when we asked, he was not talking. He was sad, chain smoking and drinking. So, I ignored everyone's advice to leave him alone. I sent him a signal message wanting to discuss with him as he was then alone and lonely. He agreed that I should come to Port Harcourt. He gave me time and date. So, I went to the meeting at Port Harcourt with him.

Chapter Twelve

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

My meeting with Adekunle lasted three days. He listened attentively. He also checked the maps with me while I explained certain facts which he was aware of all along as far back as when we were in Calabar. What his problems were for the entire 51 days absence, he kept to himself. He knew just as much as General Hassan Usman Katsina, the Chief of Army Staff in Lagos and even General Gowon, the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, that after Port Harcourt was captured, without being told, we would need reinforcements, ammunition and heavy weapons, not only to defend Port Harcourt and Rivers State, but to be ready for a serious counter-attack from Ibo heartland.

These people were military people as well and must definitely be following the progress of the war in all sectors, particularly the 3MCDO sector where we had liberated two states, established the governments of the two states and have also been able to enforce the sea blockade of the entire Atlantic coast. That, in itself, was the war won for Nigeria.

The OAU situation destroyed my relationship with Adekunle as my friend and as my boss. It was the greatest blunder of the civil war after Oluleye's concertina barbed wires sent to Akinrinade at Bonny Island at the height of a battle there. On the first day after Ted Hamman died and his wife Nelly left me at Uyo to return to Calabar, the meeting started. First with Akinrinade, at my Uyo HQ, I tried to analyse why Owerri was difficult for Sector 1 and Adekunle, and what we

could do to help. Then, together with Akinrinade, we went to Calabar to discuss same details with Ayo Ariyo.

At the end of our discussion, we all agreed that our idea of Pincer operations was a good and workable idea and that they were no more interested and should leave Adekunle alone or that I alone should go to discuss with him. Well, armed with six maps, I radioed that I was on my way to see him to discuss Owerri situation, which he agreed to, at 10.00a.m. on Friday April 25th 1969. I was there at 9.45a.m. He seemed happy to see me as we had avoided each other like a plague since the OAU issue. The whole of Friday, we analysed the issues involved, and the basis for the plan.

Why Owerri was difficult

I started by using the analogy that every complete human being has two legs and two hands and so did Biafra. We had knocked off one of the two legs on which it was standing by capturing Bonny and Calabar and the entire Atlantic Coast which gave us control of the sea. The second leg was its airport and capital at Enugu which was captured by 1 Division but because of the resilience and resourcefulness of the Iboman, he turned Port Harcourt into his centre of gravity, on which everything revolved. That again we had just captured. The collapse of Biafra, therefore, was only a matter of time. It is like a snake that you could not cut its head, it will still die if you break its back, death is only a matter of time. However, the Biafrans that we thought would collapse after Port Harcourt still continued to use its two hands to crawl after losing its two legs. They deserved credit. They had proved that they were not a pushover by any standard. So, Biafra developed a new navy and fought in the Delta and riverine areas successfully. They had their own homemade bombs and armoured tanks. Though crude, they killed nevertheless. They deserved our respect.

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I pleaded that we should not underrate these people. Even with all their problems, they had managed to develop a new airport at Uli-Ihiala, about 30 kilometres north of Owerri and about 15 kilometres from Oguta. These were ingenious people, and we should not be drunk with our successes so far. Tides could turn, and we needed to be more careful, by being a step ahead of them in our planning and strategy. In World War II, the tide turned against the Nazis, and Ojukwu as a graduate of history knows that too, perhaps.

No one would blame them for the doggedness with which they fought Utuk at Owerri. If we did not have an officer like Utuk at Owerri, the story would have been different today because George Innih and Makanjuola/Iluyomade withdrew from his flanks and their sector commander could not get them back in. That in itself was not 3MCDO style of fighting. We never lost anywhere that we did not recapture. Adekunle listened seriously, or so I thought, and he asked questions as well about what I thought Innih or Makanjuola/Iluyomade ought to have done in the circumstance. Then, I replied that they should have held their present positions and could have sent a company of just 100 men each from their units to pass through Utuk who was already inside Owerri to cut Biafra's rear of those facing their positions. Anyway, I continued my analyses of the situation and pointed out that for the Biafrans, their efforts at Owerri presently was a desperate one.

They showed no sign of cracking despite shattering defeat. However, those who urged them on were drinking and

dancing at their new HQ in Umuahia with their families, and that all we had to do was to hit them at their new centre of gravity and throw them off balance from their fulcrum. The centre of gravity which held their life together was Uli-Ihiala. Owerri was too close to Uli-Ihiala, and within artillery fire range. In no way will they let you stay there. Biafra, in such circumstance, would defend Owerri to their last blood. However, Owerri was not important to us but to them. The important place to us was Uli-Ihiala, and that is where we ought to aim at capturing and not Owerri, which would collapse if the airport at Uli-Ihiala was captured. If and when we captured that, Biafra would surely collapse also. But that would not happen through the piecemeal and conventional approach that we had applied so far. Then, we must throw them off balance from their fulcrum which was Umuahia; their centre of communication.

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If we attacked north from 13 Brigade and linked up with 1 Division at Umuahia, then, we would break Biafra into two segments and would be difficult for supplies from Uli-Ihiala to reach Arochukwu to the east. That should make the Biafran troops at Arochukwu panic. Since the troops at Owerri could not also rescue them, it should destabilise them and hopefully, when we would have achieved these two plans, Biafra itself should collapse. We would not only recapture Owerri, the war itself would end.

Our strategy all along in 3MCDO had never been to attack a town; we had always captured it by envelopment tactics. That was why we had few civilian casualties and lost just few soldiers all along in 3MCDO. I tried one more time to let him know that Ojukwu was not Biafra's centre of gravity and neither was he their pivot, because his command and control method did not give room for people to tell him the

honest truth about events. We got all these facts from intelligence reports of the goings-on in the place. I went further to analyse situations in Biafra and the effect of Ojukwu's method of achieving results on his people. Since Ojukwu made his people think of revenge and nothing else, there was scant wisdom in his blaming Hausas for revenging January 15th, 1966 coup when many of the northern leaders and military officers were killed.

The Abagana Massacre

At Abagana, a 2 Division sector of the war all the federal troops were killed and all their vehicles destroyed in an ambush by Biafran troops. These were the vehicles, ammunition, and supplies that would have been useful to them, but their sense of reasoning was beclouded by anger and hatred, so they wanted revenge. They only sought to kill anywhere and at anytime. They did the same at Onne, where the Biafran troops openly, in the front view of people in Port Harcourt, beheaded our troops that were captured. Emotions ran high in all of Biafra and that was understandable but to base plans and strategy on emotions in a war setting is gambling and raising the stakes too high. What happens if you lose? It will be total, and they lost.

That was why the Biafran troops made sure that any Nigerian troops captured had to die; which was what they did at Abagana, a 2 Division sector, and at Onne in 3MCDO sector. That is the trait of a loser. Revenge beclouded their thoughts, and it affected their judgments in all respects. For instance, they did not even know that the money that they were spending was backed up by the reserves of the government of Nigeria, so, they did not prepare enough for a currency change. All these were because they had a boss and not a leader. That was why they opposed every move we made from Obubra to Port Harcourt, because they just

wanted to oppose the federal troops, to stop our advance and kill us. So, that is why we ourselves must devise a method not to be killed while breaking their will to continue the war. They seemed not to be aware of the fact that by defending everywhere, they possibly could not be strong anywhere. We also did not have to capture everywhere to win the war. It was a game of chess.

For instance again, we rushed to capture Port Harcourt to coincide with the May 1968 Kampala Conference. They knew that they were losing the war, and it was only a matter of time before Port Harcourt would be captured, but instead of dragging the peace meeting further and further in order to gain time, to obtain more weapons or supplies and reassess their situation objectively as it was on the ground, they walked out of the conference. With that, you could surmise what stuff the person in charge was made of. I went further to say that if I were Ojukwu, with the calibre of people around me, I would have allowed the politicians to go ahead with politics, the ambassadors to go ahead with diplomacy, the scientists to go ahead with their research and developments and the military to go ahead with planning, tactics and strategy of the war itself. Then I asked Adekunle whether he thought what was happening to Biafra reflected the minds of the calibre of the leaders there, other than that of Ojukwu.

To make matters worse, I added, I was sure that Adekunle knew that Ojukwu made Nzeogwu's coup fail in the North. How could he now be crying foul? Only a failed government policy would make military defeat possible. In fact, we should not even try to capture him, for if he died, he would become a martyr. We should let his people handle him, or he may run away. Therefore, to beat back Biafrans at Owerri, we must develop a new strategy and tactics to minimise senseless violence and destruction. Then Adekunle asked

me again, how do we get to their centre of gravity at Uli-Ihiala without passing through Owerri? It was then I repeated the story of the Battle of the Bulge, which he already knew about anyway, after all, he was a Sandhurst Officer Cadet School graduate. I also explained that since 1 Division had captured Umuahia, we were lucky because a gap had been created between Umuahia and Owerri, which was a distance of about 150 kilometres. There was no way that the Biafran troops could cover all that distance with strong enough troops. If, however, they did, their troops would have been thin on the ground. Another scenario was that, if they were thin on the shop window in front and kept a sizeable and mobile reserve in the rear, we should include in our plan to engage the reserve first in the rear in a wide envelopment. That we could do because 1 Division had also captured Okigwe. With the strength that 1 Division had, just capturing town after town, little did they know that until they had captured every town in Biafra, they (*Biafra*) would not surrender.

1 Division was just inflicting casualties, by levelling everywhere. We did not have their number of troops, neither did we have their type of weapons and armoured tanks. Therefore, we should go for the substance and not the shadow. "The substance is Uli-Ihiala sir," I said. Then I went on to say that I would brief him on the three plans and we could choose anyone after explaining the pros and cons of each of the pincer plans. But first, I went ahead to explain a bit about the Battle of the Bulge during World War II, between the Germans and the Allied Forces in Belgium in 1944.

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The Battle of the Bulge

During World War II, by December 15th, 1944, the Germans made a desperate and audacious move into Eastern France through the Ardennes Forest of Belgium, heading to Antwerp with about 250,000 infantry, supported by armour and artillery. Executing "The blitzkrieg strategy" (attack with lightning speed), they captured many towns en route including Malmedy, and St. Vith, and the crossing of River Liege.

The commander of the American forces in the area was General Omar Bradley, who, at the time of the German breakthrough, was partying in Paris with General Ike Eisenhower, the Allied Commander who had just been promoted. The two of them were classmates of 1915 from West Point Academy. By December 17th, 1944 the Americans were short of everything from food to fuel and ammunition and had been pushed far back. To make matters worse, American air superiority was no use in bad weather and there was bad weather indeed. Eisenhower saw the threat, but rather than panic or reinforce failure by sending more troops to counter-attack the Nazi forces in the area, he ordered that General Omar Bradley's troops should dig in where they were around the town of Bastogne, to delay the Germans, as the Germans could not capture Antwerp without defeating the US troops at Bastogne. On the flip side, the Allied Commander ordered General George Patton, also of US army to pivot and advance south while General Montgomery, the British commander in the area should advance from the north. With good weather, air superiority for the allies was brought into play once more, and in a pincer-like operation, they attacked the Germans from the south and the north, while General Bradley was to hold on tight to where the Germans had pushed him at Bastogne.

By January 16th 1945, the allied troops regained the initiative, crushed the Germans, who never got to Antwerp,

and never passed Bastogne. The Germans had over 200,000 troops wounded, killed or captured. This will be something similar to what should happen at Owerri front. Owerri is our Bastogne in this scenario, and we should not reinforce failure by collecting cooks and stewards to counter-attack at Owerri as we had done so far.

The plan of Operation Pincer 2

The recapture of Owerri would be like the Battle of the Bulge. All Sector 1 troops would dig in and stay where the Biafrans had pushed them to at Ohoba, while Major Ola Oni and Lt. Col. Akinrinade would advance west and east of Owerri respectively and in a pincer-like operation, go for the jugular at Uli-Ihiala. We did not need Owerri or Oguta. Biafran positions wherever they might be would collapse. Meanwhile, I with 13 Brigade, would link up with 1 Division and cut Biafran troops into east and west and break communication with their nerve centre at Uli-Ihiala and with that they should collapse. That was Operation Pincer 2, for which we would not need 1 or 2 Divisions to move, rather 3MCDO alone would do the movements. That ended the first day of critical discussion with Adekunle on April 25th, 1969. He showed that he was interested. Then we were to meet early the next day at 7.00a.m. That was fine by me and I went back to where I was staying to update my maps, now that I thought he was interested and listening.

Operations Pincer 1, 2 and 3 briefing

The second day was Saturday April 26th, 1969. Owerri situation was getting critical with all efforts to drop supplies by air to the beleaguered troops of 16 Brigade became difficult, while their cries in the besieged town were getting louder. Adekunle was chain-smoking and restless. I wasn't sure if he was listening to me anymore, but he was still there

looking at the first map which was Operation Pincer 1. Then I asked, “Why did the jet fighters not escort the supply flights into Owerri?” I never got an answer, and I did not push for one, though I knew he heard me, and the point was made anyway.

The thinking behind Operation Pincer 1— Option “A”

The fact that the Biafrans had been confined to their core Iboland meant that the area would be overcrowded. Operation Pincer 1, as shown on the map, meant that the Ibo heartland would be divided into areas A, B and C. 1 Division with their HQ at Enugu would capture area A; while 2 Division with their HQ in Benin City would capture area B while 3MCDO that had already captured areas E and D would capture area C. In this option, the attacks would be coordinated by Army HQ and would take place simultaneously.

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The attacks would also be supported by the Nigerian Air Force. 1 Division would take off from Enugu airport and do a leap frog attack with three MiG Jet fighters to their targets, while 2 Division also would take off from Benin City airport and with the same tactics of leapfrogging, bomb their targets from Nnewi and down south to Awomama, Izombe and to Ogbaku. 3MCDO would also have their air force take off from Port Harcourt airport for targets at Arochukwu, Umuahia and Owerri with the infantry of the three divisions advancing to their various objectives simultaneously. There were pros and cons of this operation. *First*, there would have been heavy casualties, not only of the military, but more of civilians, because due to Biafra’s propaganda almost every Ibo person including women, children and the disabled had been displaced and had become refugees. The natives were

all evacuated from their hometowns and did not even know where they were going, what they would eat or even drink or where the next meal would come from.

Their government had already put the fear of federal troops in their minds aided, sadly, by collateral damage from Nigerian bombing raids. Everybody left their homes and were heading to whatever place. They did not even know where to sleep, eat, or where to drink and even where to go to toilet. They just kept going aimlessly and the government which had turned its people into zombies was not able to help them. Most Biafran soldiers captured had rosy cheeks but not the refugees who were like skeletons.

At the end of Op. Pincer 1, what would have been left of Ibo population would have been insignificant. It would have been a calamity. Therefore, it should just be known as an option but even the Army HQ would not approve of it. Rightly enough, at the height of 3MCDO crises when Akinrinade and I went to Lagos and spread our maps for discussions on Operations Pincer 1, 2 and 3, General Hassan Katsina straightaway condemned Option A so, Op Pincer 1 was discarded as an option. That was brutal force. Sure.

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Adekunle also looked at it, and like all military appreciation exercises, it was an option. The summary of this Op. Pincer 1 was that, all artillery, all Air Force, all armoured and heavy weapons would be massed and moved at the same time, bombing, strafing for 30 days and all the infantry of the three divisions of the Nigerian Army, except the navy would have been involved for the final battle. However, it ran

counter to General Gowon's code of conduct on how to prosecute this war.

The Plan of Operation Pincer 2 - Option 'B'

This option was to deal with the Biafran centre of gravity as well as their communications between the east and the west. This was my preferred option that I had already started to work on. I had 23 scouts sent out to strategic towns in the Biafran Iboland including Arochukwu, Umuahia, Owerri and Oguta. Our two scouts to Urualla and Umuzoma never came back. They must either have been captured and killed, or they just decided not to come back. With this option, I had a team of scouts at Eket, Opobo and at Obigbo with the sole duty of checking the timings of Biafran cargo flights to Uli-Ihiala from Sao Tome, and that by the time I got back, all information that I required would have been ready.

In this option, Major Ola Oni's 14 Brigade would advance west from Chokocho, while S.S. Tomoye's 17 Brigade, both of Sector 2, would advance east from Aba and in a pincer-like operation, capture Uli-Ihiala and by-pass Owerri. Meanwhile 12 Brigade led by Isemmede from my Sector 3 will head on to Umuahia and Ogwu from Azumini to link up with I Division troops in that sector while 13 Brigade led by me would head on to Abiriba and towards Enugu to link up with 1 Division in whatever area they were in that sector. Isemmede and Akinrinade would link up at Aba and advance to Umuahia where Akinrinade would pivot west to link up with Ola Oni at Uli-Ihiala; Isemmede would go north to Awgu; 1 Division was already there. If the fighting was heavy for 17 Brigade, however, 12 Brigade would advance west on 17 Brigade's right flank to take Uli Ihiala together in a two-pronged attack after crossing Imo River. My assignment was to divide the entire Biafra into two with Arochukwu to the east and Umuahia, (which was the known Biafran HQ) and Uli-Ihiala

would be to the west. With the capture of Uli-Ihiala and the line of communications of Biafra being cut into east and west, there would be panic on both the western and the eastern enclaves, and nothing to fight for again, we hoped that they would collapse and that the war would end.

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However, 1 Sector should dig in seriously to withstand a breakthrough by Biafran troops towards Igrita, Elele and to Port Harcourt. With this option, we would retake Owerri, and end the war as well in one swoop. In this scenario, we would not need any of the other two divisions to move for 3MCDO to end the war, like in Option "A." This would take a maximum of two weeks from the day of advance from Akinrinade at Aba and myself from Ikot Ekpene sector. Sector 1 troops in defensive position at Ohoba, would then mop up Owerri. That way, we would turn defeat into victory like General Slim in Burma during World War II. Just as we were ending this session, a radio message came in for me that Biafran cargo flights had been sighted over Eket which started at last light (about 6.00p.m.) to fly across Eket-Aba-Owerri into Uli-Ihiala. The timings were constant.

The lady scouts that left for Owerri, Umuahia and Arochukwu were back. I told them to meet me at Adekunle's house in Port Harcourt, where our meetings had taken place so far for two days. Their reports showed that Biafran troops were thinning out from various units and were reinforcing Owerri. The lady that went to Owerri confirmed that vehicles loaded with troops were arriving from many areas into Owerri. Biafran troops were no more moving from north to south but from east to west. That was perfect for Operation Pincer 2 plan and strategy; and also reported huge number of refugees mainly women and children just walking around

aimlessly and not organised. Adekunle seemed pleased so far and we went on to discuss Operation Pincer 3.

image

The thinking behind Operation Pincer 3 — Option ‘C.

This option was also a “go-it-alone” operation for 3MCDO as we entered our third day of discussions. I did most of the talking as Adekunle did not debate with me as we used to do. He was very depressed and did not look well. I think the news coming from Owerri or something else somewhere had jolted him. However, he did not say. He continued to chain smoke and looked wet.

image

This option was modification of Operation Pincer 2. The addition was that, should Operation Pincer 2 run into a hitch for whatever reason, particularly if troops from Arochukwu should interfere with Operation Pincer 2 by attacking it, then our 18 Brigade reserve troops at Itu with Lt. Col. Obeya must attack and capture Arochukwu. However, should the Biafran troops anywhere between Afikpo and Abriba interfere with advancing Operation Pincer 2, then 3MCDO troops at Ugep, Ediba and Itigidi would retake the town or towns involved. Capts. Bassey and Ekpo would standby at a moment’s notice to attack such towns.

Should the situation continue to be difficult for the advancing Operation Pincer 2, then 3MCDO Battalion at Obubra with Capt. Ishola would attack the Biafran troops from the rear, passing through 1 Division’s position at Abakaliki and advance downwards behind Biafran troops operating against Operation Pincer 2. The assumption here was that neither 1 Division nor 2 Division would want to advance or move for whatever reason or reasons.

The third day was April 27th, 1969 and it was a Sunday. With map briefing over, I thought I should have just stopped there, packed my files and maps and left. But I dragged the stories further, just to cool him down I thought, and to have company, as most of his usual crowd of hanger's-on had deserted him. Then I added that if we had heeded Akinrinade's warning on Owerri and forgotten the OAU, which was personal rather than national, we would not have lost so many men and moreso, the supplies and reinforcements he went for did not come after 51 days of stay in Lagos. These words must have touched on raw nerves. Just then Capt. Richard, the 3MCDO Military Police Commander came in with the news that Lt. Col. Utuk had started withdrawing towards Ohoba and abandoning Owerri. Adekunle started breathing heavily and pacing the floor. Utuk did not ask for authority to withdraw from Owerri.

Adekunle just walked back from nowhere and suddenly wrote on my map-"Thank you for tactics lesson 1, when do I expect more tuition?" That was his second time of writing this on my map. That was the final whistle and the end of our three-day meeting and that was the sad note on which it ended. I just quietly packed my maps and files and left for my station at Uyo. I later briefed Ayo Ariyo and Akinrinade accordingly. My final word to Adekunle was that he should not worry about Owerri, and that we could turn defeat into victory. I drew his attention to the fact that it was he the country knew and not Akinrinade, Alabi-Isama or Ayo Ariyo. So, if we all fall, it was he that would fall heaviest because people did not know us; we never went to Lagos and the general impression was that Adekunle was 3MCDO and 3MCDO was Adekunle. I advised that he should listen to us. There was nothing wrong with our sectors which were the hottest when he sent us there and that by an alliance strategy which we developed, we had stabilised the entire place from Aba to Ikot Ekpene and Calabar sectors. I ended

up by saying that we had about 700 troops ready for Operation Pincer 2 right away. Then he shouted right in front of Capt. Richard, "You see, they want to end the war and take the glory," and that "in Lagos, it was said that Alabi-Isama liberated South-eastern State, while Akinrinade liberated Rivers State".

These were mere coincidences. It simply was not true that we wanted glory for anything and for that matter, who in Lagos was there to see it or even hear it said. No pressman or journalist ever came to talk to us. My mother told Peter Obe and Agnes Filani, both photo journalists to try and bring her my picture for her to know that I was still alive. Moreso, it was Adekunle who sent us to these places to attack and capture. Where did he get this information from?

Before Peter Obe could get to where I was, Biafran bullets almost killed him. He was in a Land Rover vehicle that was riddled with bullets. After that, he never came back to look for me. It was the same for Agnes. She came looking for me to take pictures, and was brought by boat to me at Azumini. On the way back, the boat capsized and Agnes almost drowned. Then we nicknamed her, *"Aggie Baby, ajaludo ma fi ara kan omi"*. I remembered the words of Thomas Becket in British history. He was an Archbishop who said that if he had served God as much as he had served his king, the Lord would not have left him in the time of need.

I told Adekunle so, and I just left for my station at Uyo. The Sector 1 situation continued to deteriorate, right in front of Adekunle. We could not believe it. His ego, concern about his so-called reputation, (which was built for him with the sweat and blood of other officers and men), and pride, pulled him further into the morass. The more he tried to rescue the situation by the old known conventional World War II methods, the more he sank deeper into trouble. It had

become quicksand, and he did not want to use the methods we had discussed for three days from Friday to Sunday night. So, what is to be done? He just started the age old method of who to blame for his troubles. He then picked on Akinrinade and I. Ayo Ariyo was right, we should have avoided him and stayed away but my mind would not let me rest when I knew that I could help. Should we have been indifferent?

image

The situation was similar to the story of the warning of the dog to the master of the house. He was warned that he had too many rats in the house, but he did not take heed of the dog's warning.

The dog was still not satisfied and told the fowl to advise the boss that he might get sick with so many rats in the house. The fowl said that she did not care because she had been caged for a whole year with nobody to rescue her. The dog was still restless and not satisfied, he went to the cow, with the same warning, but cow also did not care. Finally, with so many rats in the house the man caught the plague and died. Well, visitors came in tens and twenties to commiserate with the wife of the master.

They had nothing for pepper soup in the house to entertain guests, so they killed the fowl for pepper soup to entertain guests. Then on the eighth day of the burial, the cow was killed for the reception party. The fowl and the cow did not care, but ended up with the same fate as the master, who also did not heed the dog's warnings. Should they have cared or not — that was the question? Adekunle was in trouble, and so was Sector 1 of the same division, under the same commander. Should the other sectors be concerned or not? Or should I have just stayed away in my sector? History

was repeating itself again here. When I was at the Midwest in 1967, should I have left Asaba when I had information about Biafran entry into the Midwest and quietly left for Benin City for the meeting that was scheduled for the next morning instead of fighting to stop the Biafrans from arriving Lagos at 6.00a.m. as they had planned? I ended up at Kirikiri Prisons, and some of those who ran away became honourable people.

The ambush

By Sunday 28th of April 1968 when I left Adekunle in Port Harcourt, Owerri had become his "*Wahala*." The entire Sector 1 operation in Owerri front had become precarious and spinning out of control. The Biafrans had withdrawn majority of their troops in certain areas to beef up their so-called Owerri success. The entire Sector 1 was in real trouble so Adekunle wanted to pass the blame on somebody. And who were those he could use? He thought of Akinrinade and I. It was already a week since I left him, and many things had happened. *First*, our lady scouts that went to Eket to check on Biafran cargo flight schedules had more reports waiting for my action, so I informed Akinrinade about the situation at Eket, which was part of my Sector 3 operational area, that Biafran cargo flights normally flew out from about 5.45p.m. daily and until about midnight. These facts had been recorded daily for over three weeks already. So, we discussed all the problems and what the aftermath would be for our operational areas of Sectors 2, 3 and 4 at Calabar, should the Biafrans retake Port Harcourt, and they may even attempt to get to Bonny. With that, our sectors would be cut off completely and the Biafrans might then regain the initiative, and control the Bight of Biafra's part of the Atlantic Ocean. What we were afraid of may turn out to be our problem. The disaster would be unimaginable, as all 3MCDO troops would either be swimming in the Atlantic

Ocean or be drowned to become food for fish in the creeks. We started looking at the worst case scenario, and thought that our last resort would either be to go it alone by implementing Op Pincer 2 or 3 using Sectors 2 and 3 to relieve Sector 1 of pressure, or to reopen the route from Calabar to link up with 1 Division at Afikpo through Ugep, Ediba, Itigidi and Obubra. I knew the route well, since I commanded our troops that captured these areas in February 1968, and the areas were still occupied by 3MCDO troops.

With that, we could pass through 1 Division from the north to attack Biafran troops from the rear at Owerri. The logistics would be massive, but it was a possibility and better than drowning in the Atlantic Ocean. Then we decided first to go to Ibono together with Akinrinade near Eket to study the report from our scouts on the Biafran cargo flights passing through the area. When we got to Ibono, between Eket and Ibono, there lay a beautiful beach, even better than the Bar Beach in Lagos and also better than the Tarqua Bay at the Atlantic Coast in Lagos. We thought of only one day trip but we met one Mr. Cromer and his German Red Cross team, who had discovered the beach and had been visiting there for the past three weeks. They also confirmed the Biafran cargo flight schedules.

We then allowed the Red Cross team to leave and decided to lay an ambush for the cargo flights. We radioed Gbadamosi King, the Nigerian Air Force jet fighter pilot at Port Harcourt to inform him of the situation in the Eket area. We made a plan to knock it down. Adekunle was attending all the three Divisional Commander's meeting in Lagos at the time. Capt. Gbadamosi King reported to his Air Force HQ in Lagos to get a go-ahead order for the first air-to-air operation in Nigeria's history and the first in Africa south of the Sahara. Eventually the approval came. The timings had to be right because the

Nigerian Air Force Russian built MiG jet fighters had no night fighting capability. Therefore, we had to operate between 5.45p.m. to 6.15p.m. Any operation after 6.15p.m. would be a disaster for the MiG jet fighter as it would not be able to land back in Port Harcourt which may result in a crash. Last light was 6.30p.m.

The flight time for the MiG jet fighters was five minutes to the target area, and five minutes back, so Gbadamosi would have only ten minutes to confront the cargo flight and would have ten minutes to spare. So, we put all the plans and co-ordinations into action. We had no ground-to-air communication between us and the air force, so we relied on the old reliable African bush signal method of using heavy and thick smoke and also to use a red very light pistol signal. We practised the timings on the first day and then the second day. The timings and the signal methods were checked and rechecked until we got all the parameters right. Should there be a reason whatsoever that would delay Capt. Gbadamosi's return to base on time before last light, he had arranged for some cars to line up the runway at Port Harcourt with their headlights on to enable him land safely. All these had been coordinated and he had taken care of his end while we had taken care of our own end of the operation. On the third day, we went into action. On June 5, 1969, a Swedish Red Cross DC-7 registered SE-ERP left Fernando Po in Equatorial Guinea, headed to Uli-Ihiala. It was overhead at exactly 5:45 p.m. Meanwhile Capt. Gbadamosi King left Port Harcourt airport dead on time at 5:40 pm; and right above our heads in the sky, at Ibono, the two flights met. Capt. Gbadamosi signalled the cargo flight to land at Port Harcourt which the pilot refused, so, after five minutes, the plane was shot down. The crew was killed instantly. The cargo flight had food items, weapons and ammunition in it. Capt. Gbadamosi reported safe landing back at Port Harcourt. We stayed for another two days at the

beach at Ibono with no more cargo flights and we went back to our stations at Uyo and Aba respectively. It was like having a corn on the cob with the leaves. To get to the corn, you had to peel the leaves one by one. The downing of the first Biafran cargo flight stopped the others, and there was panic in Biafra and that was the beginning of our march into Biafra's centre of gravity which was Uli-Ihiala. But before that, we must reduce all the obstacles to one, and that one had to be Uli-Ihiala.

My mother insisted on seeing an attack

My mother was at Uyo in June 1969 with me and wanted to see an attack.

"Alhaja", I said, "Why do you want to see an attack for God's sake?" Bullets kill!

After a long-drawn argument, I gave up, as I never liked denying her whatever she wanted. So, I got some shirts and trousers for her, which she refused.

"Alhaja, will you go with your flowing dress to the war front?"

"Yes," she answered. I warned her that it was not rioting. This was war and that one bullet would just remove her gele (head tie), the next will remove her iro (wrapper) and that she may arrive naked. She insisted on going.

I told her that I was not going with her, and I sent her with a Land Rover jeep full of escorts to Eket to where we had just shot down a Biafran cargo plane. She said that she was satisfied with that. So they left at about 6.00a.m. the next day and returned at 5.00p.m. in the evening. There were few shots fired, but she climbed the cargo plane wreckage, and had a look around it.

During an earlier visit in April 1969, my mother met Mama Richard just arriving my house at Uyo. This was the mother of Captain Richard, 3MCDO Military Police Commander in Port Harcourt. I told the woman that the situation in the area was difficult at that time, particularly in the Port Harcourt area. She had already become very friendly with my mother as they talked all night. So, with two Land Rover jeeps full of battle ready escorts, we set off for Port Harcourt, with Mama Richard and my mother in a car in the middle of the two escort vehicles. We set off very early at 5.00a.m. as we must return the same day. The roads were bad and enemy-infested. We could be ambushed anytime, anywhere. We got to Capt. Richard at about noon.

My mother went to Adekunle for about an hour while I left Mama Richard with her son. I returned to Uyo at about 5.00p.m., going through Opobo this time, instead of Ekeffe and Akwette route, which was the initial route we took to Port Harcourt. I could have sent Mama Richard with an officer and the same escort team, but because my mother always wanted to drive through the war area, I had to go along. Finally, all went well, but Mama Richard could not stay longer than one day and Richard came back with her and together with my mother, they returned to Lagos. The reason why most families passed through my sector was the airport at Calabar and since the establishment of the government there, there were frequent public flights in and out of Calabar. That was why, to get to any part of 3MCDO war area, especially today's Akwa Ibom State, people had to pass through my sector.

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That was when Justice Udo Udoma, Ambassador Ogbu, Chief (Mrs) Afi Ekong, and many more dignitaries were able to visit their people in the war affected areas. The next day, Richard and the mother showed up and I had nothing to give her but a bottle of whisky on my desk. The two mothers prayed for Richard and me and left for Calabar and thence to Lagos. Captain Dickson, the airport commandant at Lagos reported their safe arrival and Mama Richard stayed with my mother in Lagos for two days. They had become friendlier. Capt. Dickson was from Benue like Richard and his mother. That made the trip of my mother and Mama Richard much easier than it would have otherwise been. It was not often that parents or family members visited the war front especially the 3MCDO war area. This was a great coincidence but my mother always visited me at Calabar, Uyo, Asaba, Ikot Ekpene and at Port Harcourt. Everywhere there was Alabi-Isama, my mother was there. Before this time, Mrs. Nelly Hamman had left my HQ at Uyo for her base at Calabar. Many people blamed Nelly for distracting Ted Hamman's attention and claimed that her pressure made Hamman take the risk of coming out to meet her at Uyo. I also took part of the blame for allowing her to speak with her husband from my war room at Uyo. It was only to assure her that her husband was alive. After Ted Hamman's death, we restricted families from visiting the war front.

The death note (failed ambush)

Adekunle arrived once again from Lagos to Port Harcourt. Owerri situation, as noted, was already a disaster and Adekunle sent for Akinrinade and I, to report at Port Harcourt at 7.00a.m. That was most difficult indeed, as I had to leave Uyo not later than midnight to arrive Port Harcourt at 7.00a.m. We did not have even a full day's notice. Otherwise, we would have gone to stay the night at Port Harcourt or at Akinrinade's place at Asa, which was about three to four hours drive to Port Harcourt. My situation was worse, as I had to drive at night without headlights for fear of vehicular movements being detected by Biafran troops or stragglers or an ambush party on the way. So, I left at midnight and passed through areas where I had troops and their commanders from Uyo through Etinan, Ekeffe, and Akwette to Obigbo and to Asa to pick up Akinrinade. I got to Asa at about 4.a.m. All the commanders en route had sent their passwords to Akinrinade and me to be able to pass through their road blocks at night, as any mistake was death by bullet. Adekunle did not think at all about the implications of ordering us to arrive at 7.00a.m. in the morning or so I thought. Otherwise, it was premeditated for us to have an accident. Akinrinade and I had two Land Rovers full of escorts each, all battle-ready. I had an old Mercedes Benz car which I bought at Uyo from one of Justice Ntia's friends which I drove to pick up Akinrinmade. The man needed the money to pay his daughter's school fees in Ibadan at the unversity.

We set off at about 4.15a.m. and headed for Port Harcourt without the headlights on. However, as we drove, the Mercedes car's bonnet snapped open and almost shattered the windscreen. We stopped and put it right. It did the same thing after about another kilometre drive. We stopped again, and put it right, and in order not to get to Port Harcourt late, we thought that we should abandon the car and get into any of the Land Rover vehicles. Akinrinade was

in the front vehicle and I was in the fourth at the back. We got to Port Harcourt at exactly five minutes to 7.00a.m. Adekunle was by the operational RS 301 radio. With him was a Lagos musician called Roy Chicago. When we showed up at his office, he was shocked and sat up. He asked how we got to Port Harcourt. I wondered what type of question that was, since he was the one that ordered us to arrive Port Harcourt at 7.00a.m. which he knew was difficult as we had to drive through enemy areas at night without our headlights on. Also, because there were no airports at Aba or Uyo, we had to come by road. We both thought that he had changed his mind, and that we were going to discuss Operations Pincer 1, 2 and 3 and since it was a weekend, we had civil dresses in our box. Roy Chicago kept saying, "Please, do not quarrel;" I was not sure what he was talking about.

However, Adekunle became restless and was chain-smoking. Within minutes, he had lit about three or four cigarettes. Then he gathered himself together and said/'Well fine, I will talk to you one by one," and then ordered that Akinrinade should stay outside while he talked to me first. So, Akinrinade went out and stood by the door. Barely a minute after, Adekunle was yet to say a word when Akinrinade kicked the door open and said we should get out of there fast. He showed me a note written by Capt. Richard, the Military Police Commander who was at the head of an ambush party. He had been ordered to ambush our vehicles with a view to killing both of us. Apparently, it was just about 140 metres away from the corner where the ambush was laid that my car was abandoned. The ambush party was waiting to attack the Mercedes Benz car which they were sure we would be travelling in. The motorcyclist that Richard sent with the note to me at Uyo missed me because I left at midnight and he got there at 4.00a.m., at which time I had reached Akinrinade's HQ at Asa. Then the ambush party

missed us because they were expecting a Mercedes Benz to pass by. That was why, in retrospect, Adekunle asked how we got to Port Harcourt. He was probably waiting by the RS 301 radio for reports of our deaths.

The note from Capt. Richard simply said that we should not pass by Asa railway line on our way to Port Harcourt because an ambush had been laid to kill both of us. Adekunle had guessed right that we would both be in the car to Port Harcourt. When Akinrinade showed me the note, I was just short of shooting Adekunle dead. Akinrinade then asked him why he wanted to kill us after all we had done. We both just walked out with our maps and the many books we had carried for discussions with him. With our escorts, we drove as if we were heading back to our stations. After about 30 minutes drive, we ordered the escorts to go back in three of the four vehicles, and we travelled in one of the vehicles to the airport at Port Harcourt. We were lucky that a flight, a DC-3, had just arrived with ammunition and supplies and was just about going back to Lagos. We jumped into the flight and headed for Lagos. We changed to civil dress and removed our uniforms. Then at Lagos airport some soldiers came and asked Akinrinade if Lt. Cols Alabi-Isama and Akinrinade were on the flight, I just walked passed him and the soldiers. There Akinrinade told them that he was a contractor that went to supply *gari* to troops at Port Harcourt, and that many more people in uniform were still in the plane. When he caught up with me, we 'double-marched' and took a taxi and went to my mother's place in Palm Grove in Lagos and picked up a car to General Hassan Usman Katsina, the Chief of Staff (Army) and from there to General Gowon in Dodan Barracks. It was on the eve of General Gowon's marriage.

General Gowon was very kind indeed. He gave us time to discuss with him despite the goings-on with people coming

and going in preparation for his marriage. He spoke well and ordered that for safety, we should be taken to the Tarqua Bay on the Atlantic Coast by boat until he contacted us. We left him and the other senior officers there. Admiral Wey General Ekpo and Gen. Hassan who later came to join us at Dodan Barracks, read the note from Capt. Richard, which was the note warning us about the ambush. What I still could not understand till date was my offence to this officer, who was not only my boss but my friend and brother. I called him, "*Egbon mi*", meaning my elder brother. The Alabi-Isama and Adekunle families were very close friends before the war. He also had assisted in clearing the Biafrans out of Utagba area which was my father's area, and where I had obtained the chiefs' letter of support for the federal government. Adekunle also sent food to my mother through Captains Ilori and Aliyu at Utagba-Uno when he heard that my mother was there. He detailed Lt. Rabo to keep a section of ten soldiers to guard my family at Utagba-Uno when the Biafrans attacked the town. Lt. Rabo knew my mother very well at Zaria NMS; Rabo was one of my 1962 military school recruits. When I finally got home and told my mother, she could not believe that Adekunle did that to us, my mother having just left him about a couple of days earlier.

This story was finally confirmed by Adekunle himself when Akinrinade became Chief of Army Staff. I had been thrown out of the army by that time, and I was living abroad when Adekunle went to pay a courtesy call on Akinrinade at the Flag Staff House in Ikoyi. He did not deny that he wanted us killed at the war front. At least, he was honest enough to confess that to Akinrinade. "But why?" Akinrinade had asked him. The man was not sure why. Combat stress does strange things. The question was why did he want our parents to cry? Akinrinade asked him. It was later on that Akinrinade told me about Adekunle's visit and the discussions between both of them.

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Chapter Thirteen

EXIT ADEKUNLE, ENTER OBASANJO

General Gowon's marriage ceremony had ended. Army Headquarters then focussed on the problem created by our escape to Lagos from the 3MCDO war front. We had been armed with the failed ambush warning note from Capt. Richard, on the strength of which Akinrinade and I had requested to be posted out of 3MCDO. Both of us had been in the war front non-stop from October 1967 until the failed ambush incident in April 1969, almost stretched to the limit by war effort activities on a daily basis. Of all my experiences at the war front the most heart-rending was talking to a dying soldier. To be hooked with the emotions of the man as life drained from him and as he enquired about his mother, wife, children and other loved ones, were to feel the pain of death and suffering along with the dying soldier. It sapped one's energy, but that was hardly any reason for us to deserve death by ambush either, especially from what we would call friendly fire from the bullet of the tax payers of my country, and not from enemy fire: the country that I had served to the best of my ability.

So, when the decision was taken by AHQ to replace Adekunle as a result of the series of crises that culminated in the failed ambush it affected all the other divisional commanders as well. Prior to these events, Adekunle had become so popular with the entire people of Nigeria, that he had assumed the status of hero of the civil war. Adekunle's 3MCDO had captured part of the Midwest including Warri and also Escravos, Bonny, Calabar, Odukpani, Ugep, Obubra, Ikom, Ekwang, Oban, Oron, Uyo, Itu, Abak, Ikot-Ekpene,

Etinan, Eket Opobo, Bori, Akwette, Obigbo, Aletu Eleme, Elemenwa, Port Harcourt, Ahoa-da, Omoku, Degema, Buguma, Brass, Nembe, Finima, in short, today's Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Rivers States of Nigeria and the new governments were established. This made the decision to replace him a difficult one for General Yakubu Gowon.



Adekunle behind General Yakubu Gowon, and from left in front of Gowon, Capt. Ladejobi, Obeya, Alabi-Isama, and Akinrinade. Adekunle introduced me as. "Our Strategist."

Besides, Gen. Gowon had been reluctant to change Adekunle at that time because Ibadan, the capital of the then Western Region was boiling with rioting and protests over one problem or the other. The most serious one was the Agbekoya' riots. The head of state had thought that it would be politically insensitive and bad for the war effort to remove Adekunle and replace him with a non-Yoruba officer. Gen. Gowon wanted to avoid accusation of discrimination against Yoruba people, so he asked Akinrinade and I to think of somebody who could play that role.

It was at this stage that Akinrinade suggested someone he thought was his friend, Col. Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo. I did not know this officer very well, and I never served with him at any stage of my military career, but Akinrinade knew him and had taken me once to his house somewhere in Ibadan when we were lieutenants in 1963. How could a 2

lieutenant who had parents build a house, in ibadan for himself while his parents were in rented apartment at Abeokuta his hometown, I asked Akinrinade. I thought that he should first and foremost empower his parents, and improve their business. Well, he did not do so, and we were not sure he had any alive and we left it at that. Obasanjo was said to be in the Nigerian Army Engineer Corps, but all that didn't matter to me. I was more concerned about presenting our plan to end the war, as quickly as possible to General Gowon and the AHQ. In this process, I explained that we already had a plan for ending the war through "Operation Pincer 2" within 30 days. In unison, they asked:

"In 30 days?"

We both answered, "Yes sir." They sat up to listen.

"Actually", I told the generals who were all listening to me with rapt attention, as they were very interested in any plan that would end the war quickly that, "there were three options. Operations Pincer 1, Pincer 2 and Pincer 3, which we debated extensively with Adekunle before we settled for Operation Pincer 2, which we thought was most suitable for our war efforts and purpose." Akinrinade and I explained the details of this preferred option, and the contingency provisions we had put in place should anything go seriously wrong. When we explained the issues of Biafran centre of gravity, their fulcrum and their line of communication, the generals looked at each other, obviously impressed. However, General Hassan Usman Katsina requested more explanations on the issue of the 'fulcrum'. We had to do this explaining twice and the crux of it was that, at that point in time, the Biafran 'fulcrum' was Umuahia. One end of this fulcrum was Arochukwu and the other was Uli-Ihiala, which was some 32 kilometres north of Owerri. So, we had a see-saw between these two crucial towns. But of these two ends of the see-saw, Uli-Ihiala was the centre of gravity which

kept Biafra alive. Arochukwu and Uli-Ihiala/Owerri are about equidistant from Umuahia. However, Arochukwu at the other end of the see-saw posed no serious and immediate threat to the 3MCDO for it was only a few kilometres from Calabar/Oron which was our own centre of gravity, but fully neutralised by Lt. Col. Ignatius Obeya with his 18 Brigade based at Itu, a battalion at Ikot Okpora and another battalion each at Ugep and Obubra.



Lt Col. Ignations Obeya Commander 18 Cdo Brigade based at Itu-April 1968.



Lt. Col. Ignatius Obeya, 18 Brigade Commander based at Itu to neutralise Arochukwu. The task of defending Calabar from any surprise attack from Arochukwu was ably taken care of by Obeya. Above is Obeya (without his shirt), Maj. Adenuga, and Alabi-Isama at Ikot Okpara. At the time of writing this book, Maj. Adenuga had gone blind as a result, I was told, of a bullet embedded in his head which could not be removed. We never attacked Arochukwu.

Any move by Biafran troops at Arochukwu would be met with a heavy counter-attack, which had been rehearsed many times over. This was because the bases of our supplies and communication lines were at Calabar and Oron — the importance of which unfortunately, the Biafrans did not recognise, as Arochukwu was their closest position from which they could have thrown the 3MCDO off balance. But, because we were alert and conscious of the danger we faced at that axis, we had, as far back as February 1968, made solid plans to contain any Biafran attempt at punching through our lines to capture Calabar or Oron. To checkmate this possibility, we had stationed 18 Brigade, commanded by Lt. Col. Ignatius Obeya at Itu on April 20th, 1968, while a battalion each was positioned behind Arochukwu at Ugep, and Obubra much earlier in February, during the advance to capture Obubra; and to prevent the Biafran troops from crossing the Cross River at Ikot Okpara, we also had a battalion there since February 1968 and patrolled the river daily by boat.

Having thus neutralised Arochukwu, our next focus had to be Uli-Ihiala (Biafra's centre of gravity), which operation Pincer 2 was designed to capture within a month at most. I had a feeling after our explanations that we had convinced the head of state and the other generals at AHQ, why Operation Pincer 2 was a better option to end the war. General Hassan Usman Katsina, therefore, ruled out the bloody option of Operation Pincer 1, albeit for the same reason that we had rejected it at the war front during our lengthy debates with Adekunle. As Chief of Staff of the Division, all options had to be made available for consideration.

The reason Operation Pincer 1 was rejected at both ends was that the Biafran situation at that time was so tenuous that applying the massive force contemplated with Pincer 1 on the enclave would have meant wholesale massacre of the population and unimaginable destruction of structures in the Ibo heartland. That would have belied the purpose of the war serious code of conduct and confirmed Biafran genocide propaganda. The incredibly effective propaganda had frightened many Ibos to move from their places of abode deeper into the enclave until they became choked in a small, landlocked space that was surrounded by federal troops. At the same time, a sizable number were outside the enclave in 1 Division areas of responsibility.

Through this process, the Biafran leadership turned most of their people into refugees. They had little or no food, water or conveniences. Offers by Gowon to allow food in by land were turned down by Ojukwu because that option would deny covert shipment of weapons. The burden of this level of suffering by especially the disabled, elderly, women and children was unbearable for most. In order to deal with this situation intelligently, we had to think of an effective plan to bring the war quickly to an end with the minimum level of casualties on both sides. That was what Operation

Pincer 2 was designed to achieve. But as fate would have it, it was not to happen as quickly as we would have wanted, and not with Adekunle as commander.

To illustrate more convincingly to AHQ what we were trying to achieve with Pincer 2, we went into military history and cited the example of Hannibal's defeat at the battle of Zama in 202 BC. Scipio, the Roman general and his father had been fighting Hannibal unsuccessfully at the doorstep of Rome for many years. Scipio then decided to change his tactics and attack Hannibal in his centre of gravity at Zama, and then went on to capture Carthage for good. The situation we had in hand then was similar, as we told our bosses at AHQ. They looked at us and at each other again and smiled. At that point, I sensed it was a look and smile of understanding and approval. We were told to go and report back the next day.

When we met the following day, General Gowon wanted us to suggest which senior Yoruba officer we thought should replace Adekunle. Akinrinade once more mentioned Obasanjo's name instead of Sotomi, Olutoye or Oluleye, who were also staff college-trained senior Yoruba officers. Akinrinade would not have suggested Oluleye anyway, because although infantry, he had sent barbed wire to Akinrinade in Bonny in place of reinforcements that had been requested. Olutoye, in the Education Corps, was not a combatant. Gen. Gowon was skeptical about Obasanjo accepting the appointment as he was an army sapper. I drew the Head of State's attention to the fact that the position Obasanjo occupied at that time at Ibadan as the garrison commander was an infantry post. Gowon then said that we should contact him.



General Hassan Usman Katsina left Alabi-Isama (right in black jacket) visited 3MCDO in July 1968 after the capture of Port Harcourt.

Akinrinade suggested that we sent our wives to book appointment with Obasanjo in Ibadan for 10.00a.m. the next day. We arrived his doorstep at 9.24 a.m. and were ushered in. We told him our mission, and gave him a comprehensive briefing of the war front situation, and why the change of Adekunle was necessary. In this process, we had spread out our maps and I gave a comprehensive briefing about Operations Pincer 1,2, and 3. We told him what problems there were with Adekunle's plan to attack Ibo heartland without proper reorganisation and refitting of troops that had been involved in the 30-day advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt. I also reminded him that when, in July 1968, he had visited 3MCDO with General Hassan Katsina, we already had the problem of Adekunle's decision to attack Ibo heartland on our hands, as Operation OAU.

If Pincer 2 was adopted, we told Obasanjo, we were sure to end the war in 30 days. By that time, we had been speaking for over three hours without food or drink. The man simply listened as we did the talking. And when he spoke,

he asked, "How do you know that Uli-Ihiala is the centre of gravity of Biafra?"

That question put me off completely, and I had to ask Akinrinade if he would like to repeat the explanations. He was at it again until 2.00p.m. when Obasanjo then told us that he was an engineer, and that he was not going to the war front! I was livid. We had been with this man for four hours without food or water as he offered us none and in spite of all we said, here was this officer saying he won't come to the war front! I told Akinrinade that we had to get out of Obasanjo's house fast, but not before I had given him a dressing down. I reminded him of a similar behaviour he had shown when the Biafrans entered the Midwest, and we asked the army in Ibadan to blow up the Ore bridge to further delay the Biafran advance to Lagos. Obasanjo's corps of engineers was nowhere to be found. But for the courage of one Mr. Akande, a civilian from the Public Works Department at Ibadan, who blew up the bridge with the assistance of his men from the Ministry of Works, even without the supervision of the military, the advancing Biafran troops would have probably marched on to Lagos, though they too were poorly led and lily-livered.



At a briefing in Port Harcourt. From left, Obeya, Gen. Katsina (hands on his knees), Alabi-Isama and Obasanjo in 1968 before Obasanjo took over the command of 3MCDO in May 1969.

I was so annoyed that I went on pouring venom on this officer, asking what engineering university he did attend anyway! We were out there in the war front carrying our dead and wounded comrades daily and he just sat there in Ibadan talking of being an engineer - so what! In anger, I reminded him also that we had engineers like Bayo Onadeko, Oladejobi and Duke who were university graduates and Capt. Olajire at the war front who were building roads, bridges and pontoons to facilitate our advance and at that point Akinrinade and I stormed out of his house.

By the time we returned to Lagos, General Gowon had given the orders through the Army HQ that all divisional commanders at the war front who had been there for upwards of two years or more should be changed. Col. Bisalla would replace Col. Shuwa, while Col. Jalo took over from Col. Haruna, and Col. Obasanjo was named as replacement for Adekunle. Many people received the news

of Adekunle's replacement with shock and sadness. They couldn't understand why and one of them was Col. Father Pedro Martins. Together with Commodore Akinwale Wey Pedro Martins visited me on our return to Lagos to find out what exactly went wrong for Adekunle to be removed at a time when the entire country thought that 3MCDO was doing well under his leadership.

I then narrated the story of how Adekunle had changed completely, how he had underrated the Biafrans as spineless with no fire power in their belly, which led him into taking wrong decisions and muting ideas that resulted in the kind of casualties hitherto unknown to 3MCDO. Against all advice to the contrary, Adekunle advanced into Ibo heartland without adequate preparation. His military tactics and strategy were wrong. Besides, it appeared as if Col. Adekunle became drunk with success. Like Col. Murtala Mohammed, when he ignored the warnings of Akinrinade over the Asaba River Niger crossing, the results were tragic. Then I turned to Father Pedro Martins and asked, "Did the Holy Book not say in *1 Timothy 4 v 4* that for their destruction, they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths?" Col. Fr. Pedro Martins laughed, and I told him that I also know the Bible fairly well, to which he said that he was impressed.

Years later, when I went to visit him (Pedro Martins) in 2009 in the company of Kayode Williams of NTA news, for a belated 90th birthday greeting, he remembered everything and rehashed the entire situation. He also reminded me of a book that I gave to him in 1971 titled, "The Sword of Allah—Khalid Bin Al-Waleed" written by Pakistani General Akram.

The main mythical idea that brought Adekunle down was his 1968 OAU (Owerri, Aba and Umuahia) operation. But there was no adequate preparation for the OAU campaign, the tactics and strategy were wrong, and the man would not listen to advice. The transfer order for Col. Obasanjo to take

over from Col. Adekunle was issued on Monday May 12th, 1969, but Obasanjo did not officially take over 3MCDO until Friday May 16th, 1969.

At the time of his takeover of the command, Adekunle had ordered a reorganisation in which we had reverted to the 'sector' organogram, with Ayo Ariyo as commander of Sector 4 in Calabar; Akinrinade as commander of Sector 2 in Aba, while I was the commander of Sector 3 in the Uyo and Ikot Ekpene axis. These three axes were initially in trouble before sending us there which we stabilised and made solid on the ground, with the exception of Sector 1 in the Owerri front which could not be stabilised and had problems. Col. Obasanjo was further briefed on what had happened, what was happening and what we expected should happen. The briefing was as comprehensive - with maps - as what we gave him at his Ibadan residence. We did not know that this officer had vengeance in his mind for bringing him to the front and because we told him off at his house in Ibadan, when we first briefed him on the war situation. I had forgotten the incident after the briefing in Ibadan, but Obasanjo didn't; and little did I know that the man held a grudge against me because he thought I had brought him to the front to die. I did not know this man very well in the army. Besides, he did not do any sports for the army, and I was the army sports captain from 1964 to 1977. Otherwise, I would have known him. Besides, it was Akinrinade who knew him well enough to suggest his name to the Army HQ, and to General Gowon, the head of state. However, I just went about my work normally.

Obasanjo's first battle experience — a fiasco

Briefing over, Col. Obasanjo was ready to go as commander of 3MCDO, but his very first move was a disaster. In complete disregard of our advice, he planned an attack from the same problematic Sector 1 under Lt. Col. Godwin Ally.

The target was again Ohoba, a town of about 40 kilometres south of Owerri where Adekunle's conventional war tactics had resulted in heavy casualties earlier on. Obasanjo did exactly what Adekunle had done by reinforcing failure. The pity of this failure, however, was that Obasanjo himself was not there at the war front to experience the tragedy. He ordered Lt. Col. Godwin Ally to counter-attack. He saw them advance, but turned back and travelled to his HQ in Port Harcourt, a distance of about 240 kilometres away. Obasanjo had no operational HQ in the field which we call command post in the army. He had no map of the operation, there was no intelligence report as to the strength of the enemy, and their reinforcement capability, or how far behind their reserves were. He just thought that the troops would simply get up and capture the place. The atmosphere everywhere was abysmal. He thought that our success so far was because we just got up and moved without a plan of action. Our plans had always been slow-slow, quick-quick. That is, we slowly and painstakingly checked and considered all options, then made the plan before getting up to attack. In any case, what was the aim of attacking Ohoba, and what would the capture of the town mean to the overall plan to end the war? It was like capturing all the individual pawns in a game of chess, just to checkmate the king. That would be curious.

Lt. Col. Ally had been hamstrung all along as to how that sector's problems should be solved. Once again, that attack was beaten back by the Biafrans with heavy casualties to the commando forces. A most unthinkable aspect of this failure was that Obasanjo made some of the tired, spent and recuperating 16 Brigade troops that were previously beleaguered inside Owerri for seven months to join in the attack. Initially as far as Ayo Ariyo was concerned, Obasanjo's blunder should not have been our concern since that was what got us into trouble with Adekunle in the first

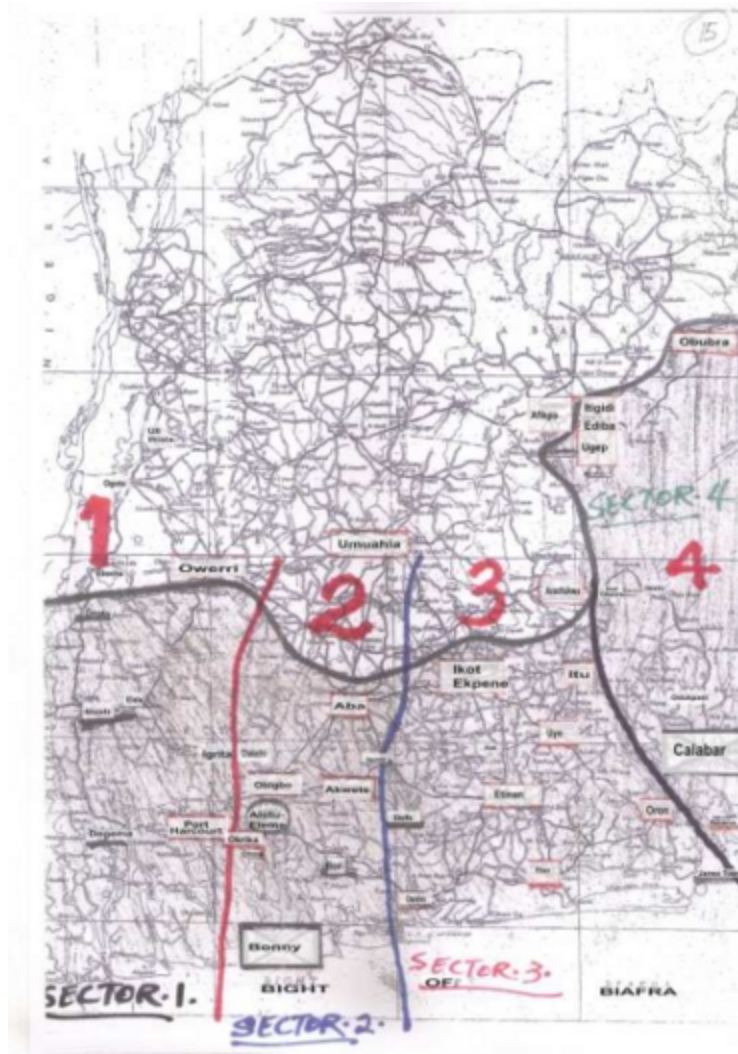
place, although the situation got us pretty worried. Later, Akinrinade, Ayo Ariyo and myself met and decided to see Obasanjo in Port Harcourt, to let him appreciate the dangers associated with his Ohoba failure.

We thought we should not sit back at our bases and watch what we had worked so hard to achieve crumble before our very eyes. At that point, Biafran troops morale was riding high: they had recaptured Owerri, and beaten back the counter-attack ordered by Obasanjo, and were now threatening to advance further south to Port Harcourt. Should that happen, our positions in Calabar, Uyo and Aba would have been threatened, and we would also have been in greater trouble should the Biafrans get to Bonny. In our attempt to prevent this threat, we decided that I should go and brief Obasanjo again, and try to make him see reason, because his very first command action had become a disaster and was causing troops to desert their frontline positions all over again.

My meeting with Obasanjo was a difficult one. I recounted the series of blunders that led to the problem of Utuk in Owerri. I gave graphic description of how Makanjuola and George Innih had been responsible for Utuk being besieged in Owerri. Makanjuola's 15 Brigade and Innih's 14 Brigade withdrew from the battle front and were unable to link up with Utuk. After the change in command, they went to Sector 1 HQ and were involved in dancing 'Swange' to receive Obasanjo to Sector 1. These same officers who had failed in that particular sector were the same ones Obasanjo sent on his first mission to attack Ohoba without supervision, and our troops were killed like chicken. My remarks angered Ally and Innih who became openly hostile towards me. However, Utuk, who had suffered from these two officers' incompetence and inefficiency for seven months in Owerri understood what I was talking about.

Notwithstanding their hostility, I did not hide my feelings at all and warned Obasanjo again that war was no longer fought that way. I started all over again explaining the plan (Pincer 2) that we knew would work and end the war quickly. He did not have to agree with me, he only had to listen as the final decision was his as the commander. I retold the stories of the 'Battle of the Bulge' of World War II and Hannibal's battle at Cannae in 216 BC, and what strategy was best to bring the war to an end. Obasanjo thereafter, called a meeting of all officers where he spoke about what he planned to do next. If anything, I least expected what I heard.

First, he wanted to straighten the line of defence, then he planned to make *all troops get their full salaries at the war front*. Then he went on talking about welfare, as if we were in the barracks. This time, I did not confront him openly; I waited until the end of the meeting and had a private audience with him. As humbly as I could ever be, I told him why we would not find it easy to operate that way in a war front. Many of the soldiers whom he wanted to give their full salaries to, were the bread winners of their families back home. So it could not have been advisable to pay them full salaries at the war front. Instead, allotments of their salaries (as we were organised before Obasanjo took over) were better paid to their next of kin for rents, school fees and other bills to be settled back home, since troops had nothing to buy in the war front.



Position of 3MCDO in May 1969 when Obasanjo took over command.

In the case of straightening the defence line, I brought maps to show him 3MCDO positions as of May 1969 when he arrived. It was not a question of using a ruler, or making a straight line as in a ceremonial parade, or some kind of geometry or engineering drawing where one would be looking for straight lines. The defence lines Obasanjo met stretched from Obubra to the east and Omoku to the west, spanning over 800 kilometres of the states bordering Ibo heartland. They were state boundaries before Adekunle committed the division into operation OAU, which is what brought us this far. To straighten them would have taken 3MCDO smack into Ibo heartland for which we were not

prepared. Therefore, these lines he wanted straightened were the defensible positions which had correlation with the political reality we wanted to stabilise. I reiterated that in a war setting (which he himself was aware of), infantry troops would normally take defensible lines which were what we had done in the over 800 kilometres-long border between Ibo heartland and the two non-Ibo states which had been liberated. I went further to inform him (if he did not know already) that but for officers like Capt. Ola Oni holding doggedly on to Chokocho, Port Harcourt itself would have been in trouble since George Innih's withdrawal from Utuk's right flank at Owerri. By this time, Obasanjo had become not only uncomfortable but also irritated with my loud complaints and advice, moreso because his war plans were not working. His ego would not allow him to take our advice, and the man he depended on to draw a plan for him, Lt. Col. Godwin Ally, only brought forward plans that led to mounting casualties which resulted in troops deserting the war front.



Col. Bisalla, left, could not accept Obasanjo's Op. Pincer 1 plan, May 1969 .

It was only when this started to happen that Obasanjo thought it was time he did something different. He came back to look at the Pincer Operations plan, what he should have done from day one in the first place! To start with, he

then decided to reorganise the division; and, as usual when there was such need for critical reshuffling, it was either Akinrinade or myself who would be transferred to the trouble spot. Obasanjo did exactly the same thing for his reorganisation, but everybody already knew he was talking of transferring Akinrinade or myself to Owerri front. So, as expected, he moved Akinrinade to 3MCDO HQ as GSOL. Actually, Akinrinade was to be preferred because I had become uncomfortably too loud for Obasanjo but his choice was fine by me as Akinrinade himself knew all the details of Operations Pincer 1,2 and 3. Both of us had the benefit of experience on the subject in question, and our advice to him was based on that experience. We had thought that Obasanjo would call for an extensive debate, but he chose to rely on the same people who had caused the Owerri problem in the first instance.

Further to Obasanjo's reorganisation, Major S. S. Tomoye who was my deputy in Sector 3, was moved to Akinrinade's 17 Brigade in Aba. Prior to his redeployment, Tomoye was deputy and Brigade Major at 13 Brigade in Uyo. He also knew about Operations Pincer 1,2 and 3. As a matter of fact, he helped draw all the maps and organise the training related to the final battle for the capture of Biafra's centre of gravity at Uli-Ihiala. We were no longer in the riverine war theatre, so tactics needed to change as we expected heavy casualties, which necessitated more training for the Medical Evacuation Team on how to evacuate casualties under heavy fire. It was okay by me as long as the entire brigade knew about Operations Pincer 1, 2 and 3 and the troops that fought so hard and well from Calabar to Port Harcourt did not just die like chicken in the hands of an inexperienced commander; but the casualties kept coming in an alarming rate.

However, Obasanjo's aim in reorganising the division as he did was to ensure that as GSOL Akinrinade would still be

able to control his old 17 Brigade under the new command of Major Tomoye as well as the 13 Brigade. But there was a snag. Of all the Pincer options, the one Obasanjo had preference for was Operation Pincer 1 which was the bloodiest, and the one rejected by the Army HQ as well as 3MCDO under Adekunle. And to canvass support for his choice, he went to 1 Division himself to brief Col. Bisalla on Pincer 1. Bisalla was not in Enugu at the time, so he spoke with Lt. Col. Danjuma who received him warmly but could not take a decision on the issue. Obasanjo also got in touch with 2 Division on the same subject.

However, when Bisalla returned to base in Enugu and looked at the bloody implication of Operation Pincer 1, he rejected the plan. That was how God saved Nigeria and Biafra from what would have been a senseless massacre that would have forever blighted the conduct of the civil war, and the image of Nigeria. To give a picture of the enormity of the possible consequences of Operations Pincer 1, you just have to think of a people trapped and surrounded by 1 and 2 Divisions, of the Nigerian army, and the 3MCDO, all of them advancing simultaneously with tank, artillery and air support bombardment. Could Nigeria have been able to justify the aftermath? But that was Obasanjo's preference, which practically everybody in the command structure of the entire Nigerian army rejected. In retrospect brutal force was used in Odi Bayelsa state on November 20, 1999 and also at Zaki Biam when Obasanjo was civilian president. These were very bloody. Since he had to settle for Pincer 2, innocent refugees, women and children, including the aged and disabled trapped in what was left of Biafra were thus saved from the horror of the devastation that would have been their fate if Obasanjo had had his way. My modest estimate is that if Operation Pincer 1 had been executed there would have been a total of only slightly over a million Ibos left in Nigeria today. And there would have been no way

we could absolve ourselves from heavy responsibility of what could truly have been genocide. In the final analysis, Obasanjo and Bisalla met at a meeting in Lagos where Bisalla had to explain why he could not accept to go along with Operation Pincer 1.1 was therefore transferred to Enugu while Major George Innih was transferred to take over my 13 Brigade in Uyo. The plan looked good even if he made it seem as though this latter change was designed to replace the idea of the person who commanded 13 Brigade.



Col. Benjamin Maja Adekunle General Officer Commanding 3 Marine Commando Division Nigerian Army. (1967-May 1969.) and Alabi-Isama standing.

Tragedy of Adekunle's fall

Col. Benjamin Adekunle, a Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst graduate, had been in the war front for upward of 30 months. He had been recording exceptional successes from sea landing at Bonny Oil Terminal Island in July 1967 to the Midwest Niger-Delta operations in August to another sea landing again supported by the Nigerian Navy in October 1967 for the liberation of Calabar. After the Biafran incursion into the Midwest triggered the formalisation of three divisions, he asked for and obtained the authority to rename his Bonny Task Force 'The 3 Marine Commando Division,' (3MCDO) due to its specialisation in operations along the

Atlantic coast and in the Escravos, Warri, and the Niger Delta area of our country. However, while marine operations still remained a challenge to our country, for which 3MCDO had become an expert, shortly after the war the name of the division was changed to 3rd Infantry (later armoured) division, and the division relocated away from their area of expertise to Jos in the northern part of Nigeria. In August 2010, the division's original octopus logo was changed to a rhinoceros to reflect its new role as an armoured division. The net effect of these events has been to wipe out the operational heritage of the division and its founder, Col. Benjamin Adekunle from the history of the Nigerian Army.

Adekunle earned his nick-name, the 'Black Scorpion' for not losing any battle from Bonny through Calabar and Warri to Ugep, Obubra, Oron, Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Itu, Eket, Abak, Etinan, Opobo, Aletu Eleme, Bori, Okrika, Port Harcourt, Degema, Buguma, Abonema, Finima, Nembe, Brass, Ahoada - in short, his 3MCDO division liberated part of the Midwest, as well as the entire South Eastern and Rivers States of Nigeria during the civil war, and established the governments of the two states. Those two states are now Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Bayelsa States of Nigeria. Actually, the phrase, 'Black Scorpion,' was coined by Mr. Winston Churchill, Jnr, son of Rudolf Churchill, and grandson of late wartime Prime Minister of England when he visited my HQ at Uyo with another Nigerian journalist, Kola Animasaun, not too long after the Arab-Israeli Six-Day war. For whatever the reason or reasons, Adekunle and Winston could not get along with each other. He was interested in seeing the plan of the 30-day advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt. Col. Adekunle then sent him to Uyo to see me on the subject. I showed him around all the areas covered, including the river-crossing sites at Opobo with dug-out canoes, the swimmers, and the pontoons. He was taken around for a whole day, and was briefed accordingly.

The plan on the map looked like a scorpion, and I also explained that like a scorpion, the sting was in the tail. The tail of the plan was my envelopment and ambush force at Uyo. So when he got back to England, he used the word 'Black Scorpion' to describe 3MCDO operations in the Nigerian Atlantic theater of the civil war, while writing for *The Times* newspaper of London. The insignia of 13 Brigade at Uyo was the scorpion, and the first commander of 13 Brigade was Maj. Sunny Tuoyo. So, everywhere was adorned with the scorpion, and Adekunle personified the scorpion, whereas his insignia which was that of 3MCDO was actually the octopus.

Well, it showed that the federal government was winning the war, as the 3MCDO capture of Bonny Oil Terminal, Calabar and later, Port Harcourt gave the Federal Government of Nigeria control of the sea and the entire Atlantic coast, which meant that the main legs on which Biafra stood had been broken.

To add more to Biafras problems, 1 Division of the Nigerian Army had captured Enugu earlier in the war and Umuahia again by April 1969 which were the two known capitals of Biafra at that stage. With Adekunle's 3MCDO capture of Port Harcourt in May 1968, the federal government achieved air superiority, at least temporarily. The change of currency, and control of all their airports and sea ports ended whatever rational reason there was to continue the fight. But for emotional reasons combined with the ingenuity of the Ibo people, their will to fight was unbroken. You better believe it, Biafra was not finished yet and very deadly while we were getting tired. They redoubled their efforts and were alleged to have had help from France but it was too little too late.

Everything was collapsing around Biafra. 3MCDO captured Port Harcourt in May 1968, and by August, Biafra's

powerful Public Relations Officer in the USA resigned based on what we had debated and discussed since April 1968, when we saw how Annang people were treated, and how a whole village was ordered to be evacuated as if it were a deliberate plan to make their people suffer. The only way to stop the suffering of the people was to go for their centre of gravity and not to continue to capture towns.

All 3MCDO units, no matter how small, had more than enough resources to defend their locations but not to advance an inch. Blisters, malaria, dysentery, cholera, cold, snake bites and fatigue took their toll on our troops. All unit commanders were then ordered to embark on massive recruitment and training. The training this time, was not canoeing or swimming but normal military tactics, special forces training, including map reading, fitness for long treks and weapons training.

Biafra established yet another airport - at Uli-Ihiala creating a new reality necessitating a new strategy and a new operational plan as extreme situations required extreme measures. Ojukwu on the other hand, did not negotiate when he was in a position of strength to do so. Instead, he was urging his people to fight on. In the meantime, he did not think of dragging the peace meetings further in Kampala, Uganda in May 1968 in order to buy time and to gain strength, as a result, many more died everyday. It was at that point in time that their centre of gravity shifted to Uli-Ihiala. Adekunle did not initially appreciate that there was now a new reality on our hands, so we missed the fact, ignored the substance and were chasing shadows. When, in July 1968, Port Harcourt was captured, and Adekunle then ordered operation OAU (Owerri, Aba, Umuahia) as an October 1st, 1968 independence gift to Gen. Gowon and to all Nigeria, he missed the appreciation of the situation completely.

The issues at this time *were: firstly*, Biafra had shrunk to less than a third of its original size. *Secondly*, more than 50% of all Ibos were crammed in with no more place to go. Paradoxically though, it also meant that militarily, their reinforcement and supply turn-around time was shorter (strategy of interior lines) but only if refugees did not clog up the roads. *Thirdly*, their own propaganda had started to work against them because many had become refugees out of fear. Meanwhile, their leaders had no answer for the problem, given the limited amount of food that could be smuggled in with weapons by air, once they turned down offers to truck in food by road after inspection. When one of Biafra's cargo ships (*The Josina*) was captured on the Atlantic, and a supply flight was shot down over Eket, international supply agencies altered the route of subsequent operations. On the opposite side of the war theatre, however, in the 3MCDO operation areas of South-eastern and Rivers States, the natives were advised not to be refugees in their own country.

If Biafrans had little food, it also meant that their military had little food and that what little was available would be fought over, and perhaps could even threaten to become an internal security problem. I suspect that they later started to appreciate the relatively greater importance of agriculture over trading which was the specialty of Ibo people. They realised that troops could not move on empty stomachs. Therefore, the importance of Uli-Ihiala as the centre of gravity to the entire Biafran military operation and civilian administration was not in doubt as their livelihood and survival depended on it. Unfortunately, Adekunle initially did not see it that way. He could not visualise that the fall of Biafra was certain if their centre of gravity was captured. Adekunle rather wanted each major town captured, just like 1 Division was doing, but he did not fully appreciate the much larger amount of fire power and mobility available to 1

Division in contrast to what was available to 3MCDO. In any case to me, to win the war was better than to win the battles.



We fed captured Biafran POWs, and re-kitted them.



3MCDO troops fed once at 5.00 p.m. daily in order to have enough for all. Here, in this picture, we also fed the natives and children at Aba.



Frightened by their leaders' propaganda, Biafrans moved as refugees from their homes to unknown destinations, as we advanced. They left their cows, chickens and food behind, because they could not carry much.



The result of evacuating people from their villages was hunger which turned people into skeletons. These starving Biafran children were without their parents.

forward enough, both to read the battles and to appreciate the enormity of the logistic problems of their people due to their village evacuation order.

Major blunders of the civil war by 3MCDO

The OAU (Owerri, Aba, Umuahia) operations were perhaps some of the greatest blunders of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. *Firstly*, Adekunle saw the battle situation as very simple and that Biafrans had no fire in their bellies any more. He thought they had become spineless or even lily livered. He found out otherwise when he went close to a drowning person, so to say, because when he ordered the attack on Aba at the beginning of his OAU plan, he had terrible casualties. He saw what it was for a drowning person to want to survive. Our most brilliant officer, Lt. Col. Philemon Shande, died in that attack.

Secondly, he imagined that the Biafrans were just a pushover because 480 kilometres were covered by his 3MCDO troops from Calabar to Port Harcourt without his being there, and in just 30 days. He thought that if his officers could achieve that feat in his absence, he could do much better even without them. There again, he found out the hard way when about 1,500 of 3MCDO troops entered Owerri, and only about 500 returned alive, and those that came out alive were completely spent. He was learning hard lessons the way he would never have thought of.

Finally, when Adekunle went to attack Oguta again, as he did with Aba and Owerri, he called those whose protests were too loud cowards. In annoyance, these officers led their men into the death ground. Adekunle ordered the attack on Oguta without appreciating the proximity of Oguta to Uli-Ihiala which was Biafra's only airport, their only link to the outside world, their only food and ammunition supply line, without which they were finished as a country and as a people. They, therefore, defended Oguta with all they had,

to the extent that Maj. Makanjuola that commanded the 15 Brigade of 1,500 men which attacked Oguta got lost for seven days. Surviving troops that returned to their Omoku base were less than 50!

Adekunle could not understand why all these were happening to him and why his invincible 3MCDO Division that captured Bonny Island and Calabar in a sea-landing operation could not land at Oguta by boat through Orashi River. He must have forgotten that he had Nigerian naval-landing craft in support and their fire power also. It was then that it dawned on him that Biafra, though dying, was not yet dead and no commander should ever underrate the enemy. The singular fact that hit Adekunle most was the breakout of Major Utuk from Owerri. It was a blow to his ego. He had not, until then, lost any major battle in combat. This remarkable effort by Major Utuk and his troops who had been besieged for about seven months inside Owerri from September 1968 to April 1969 and did not surrender to Biafran troops, devastated Adekunle. Utuk came out with his POWs, refugees, his walking wounded and dying troops, as well as the dead body of his Brigade Major Ted Hamman. But the entire Sector 1 could not infiltrate into Owerri to relieve him of pressure, or help hold the town after 14 Brigade commanded by Major George Innih withdrew from the right of 16 Brigade and 15 Brigade withdrew from Oguta on the left, leaving Utuk's 16 Brigade to bear the brunt of Biafra's onslaught with no food, water, ammunition and medicine for so long.

When Major Utuk left from Owerri for his sector HQ at Ohoba some 24 to 32 kilometres away south of Owerri, he wept when he saw his sector commander Lt. Col. Godwin Ally partying and dancing 'Swange' with some ladies at Ohoba. His troops had not had adequate meal for about three months or more, since air drop logistic operations were abandoned. Some of his men were photographed by my

cameraman after his breakout. He also came to see me at my Uyo HQ. He could not stop talking, and could not stop crying. I was his company commander back at the 4th Battalion in Ibadan in 1965 before the war and we had since been very close. I also led him during the Obubra attack and he was with me during the 3MCDO ambush of Biafran troops at Uyo. He was also the point unit commander, advancing with me for the capture of Umuko-roshi during the assault on Port Harcourt. Twenty-five years after the war, in 1995, I went to see him at Ikot Ekpene, his hometown. His parents had died and his wife and children had left him. He finally died penniless without any government appointment or support. Utuk had no professional skills outside military life. He was a Nigerian Military School graduate which he joined at the age of thirteen.



Major Utuk at Ohoba, with his survivors of the Owerri siege.



Major Utuk, right and Lt. Col. Eromobor.



Here as Lt. Col. Utuk, Commander 16 Brigade



Utuk, (third from left,) while interrogating a captured Biafran officer. Alabi-Isama is fourth from left; Ayo Ariyo is third from right.

Biafran officers and men also acknowledged this major as the best fighter, the best commander, and the hero of the Nigeria-Biafra war but he died broke all the same. That is the tragedy of courage in the Nigerian setting. With all these, Adekunle's vaunted persona as war general evaporated like a soap bubble while the invincibility of his 3MCDO Division became a joke, especially among his peers already jealous of his earlier successes in the war. His grave mistakes were that he thought he earned the name black scorpion alone; he underrated his enemy and alienated his comrades. He did not allow his troops to refit and regroup after the 30-day forced march to capture Port Harcourt, which was a major operation. He was drunk with success.



Many faces and moods of Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama.



Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama.



At a weekend celebration and party after the capture of Port-Harcourt



Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama at Uyo (1968) after planning operation pincer 2 which ended the war.

Then on top of it all, he personalised the war by wanting to give a gift to Gen. Gowon and the country for October 1st independence celebrations. He allowed his ego to get the better of him, then finally, he began looking for scapegoats

for all these. Perhaps affected by combat stress, in desperation, he turned his venom on his colleagues, Alabi-Isama and others. When, in 1980, he paid a courtesy call on Akinrinade who had just been appointed Chief of Staff of the Nigerian Army, he did not deny when confronted. He just joked "I almost got you boys killed in the war front." Thank God we survived. Adekunle learnt that going into Ibo heartland when the terrain and situation had changed significantly required critical thinking and planning to address the changed situation. Thinking critically is more than just thinking; it involves an objective, logical and realistic appreciation of the situation. Adekunle failed to appreciate this and was overwhelmed by the grave consequences that resulted from the fire brigade approach he adopted. That was unlike him. It was then he realised that he and Sector 1 of 3MCDO were in trouble. 1 Division was inching forward in a conventional way, and capturing one town after the other, but that did not end the war. It only added more to the number of casualties on both sides because they did not look for or engage the centre of gravity of Biafra.

In a conventional battle plan, one had to have at the least a three to one superiority or more in men and equipment, and 1 Division had that and more which 3MCDO did not have. But by then, Adekunle was completely tired and frustrated; a situation which continued to affect his judgments in all respects. In many armies, there are guidelines for frontline troop rotations to avoid this type of situation. Adekunle lost control completely.

He beat up troops and civilians physically, including the secretaries of Lt. Col. Akinrinade and mine. He ordered that the heads of these lady-secretaries be shaved because they did not know where both of us were hiding. As it happened, we had both arrived in Lagos and bluntly refused to return to the war front until after AHQ and the Commander-in-Chief,

Gen. Gowon in their wisdom decided to change not only Col. Adekunle from 3MCDO but all the other divisional commanders since 1 Division commander, Col. Mohammed Shuwa and Col. Benjamin Adekunle of 3MCDO had continuously served at least 24 months each since the war broke out in 1967. To mask the focus of the change, Col. I.B.M. Haruna who had held fort in 2 Division after Col. Murtala Mohammed simply walked off the job after Asaba crossings and Abagana disasters, was also replaced. So exit Adekunle and entered Col. Olusegun Obasanjo into 3MCDO in the South Atlantic theatre of the war. Colonels Bisalla and Jalo took over command of the 1st and 2nd divisions respectively.

Col. Olusegun Obasanjo arrived at 3MCDO Port Harcourt on the 16th of May, 1969 and we thought that the war was just about a maximum of 30 days away from ending if we could concentrate all our efforts at capturing the Biafran centre of gravity. In order to confirm that no other place or town was the Biafran centre of gravity other than Uli-Ihiala, 1 Division captured Umuahia in April, 1969, but the Biafrans were still fighting and did not give up. Col. Obasanjo was briefed in his home at Ibadan **before** and in Port Harcourt **after** he took over command of 3MCDO on Operations Pincer 1, 2 and 3. We did not say that the only way to win the war was through any of the three operations, we only advised that the three plans needed to be looked at in the absence of any other plan. Understandably, Col. Obasanjo had no battle experience and had never fought at any of the three fronts of the war. He had never commanded a battalion or a brigade, now he had to command a division in battle. That was why his military administration and logistics placing was that of a cadet as he referred to in his book *My Command*. He had initially claimed to Akinrinade and I at his home in Ibadan that he was of the Army Engineers Corps and not an infantry officer, and was not going to the war

front. This caused friction between us, until he was ordered by Army HQ to take over 3MCDO in Port Harcourt. His seniority in the army and his ethnicity coupled with Lt. Col. Akinrinade's recommendation, qualified him for the job. It was felt that a Yorubaman was required to replace Col. Adekunle who was himself Yoruba. Col. Obasanjo subsequently made many efforts to distance himself from the advice of Akinrinade and myself, which cost him and, of course, Sector 1 of 3MCDO Division dearly. As GOC, Col. Obasanjo did not have to accept our advice, which was borne out of sound war experience, and our knowledge of the situation on the ground. He only had to make his own plan, and implement it. What he knew how to do, he did, but it resulted in heavy losses which we tried desperately to avoid, if only he listened. Akinrinade and I sat down one day to reappraise our situation and why we got into trouble with our bosses. We started with his problem with Murtala Mohammed at Asaba, when Akinrinade advised against a frontal attack across the Niger. The result was that well over a thousand federal troops died by drowning and bullet wounds in the River Niger or in the convoy at Abagana as if they were on a bush exercise. My main point, however, was that nobody cared, and nobody found out why it happened to avoid such in the future, and for posterity to learn from the mistakes of the past generation.

That is why we have history. Elders that are worth their salt get concerned about the next generation, while politicians talk about the next election. An officer called Capt. Afolabi was an NMS student when I was tactics instructor at the school. We met again in the 3MCDO at Calabar during the advance to Port Harcourt. When we got to Opobo, I went to the waterside to oversee the night crossing and there was Capt. Afolabi. I asked if his men had crossed, and he said he was next to go. Then I told him to complete the crossing by 6.00a.m. Not only did he say, "Yes

sir," he added, "I must try by all means by the good grace of God." I patted him on the back and we moved on. He was later shot at Igrita after the capture of Port Harcourt and as I carried him into my jeep, he looked at me in the face and realised that it was me. Then just before he died and still looking at me, he said, "Sir, did I try?" I will live with that for the rest of my life. Capt. Afolabi died in my hands with his blood on my shirt. I wept and each time I remember his look and his voice and what he said, I get moved with tears. During the advance, I would ask for names of some of the soldiers and when next I saw them, I tried to call such names and pat them on the back. I had developed a relationship with most of them. Sometimes, I would sit down to talk with them about their hometowns and who they knew in the area. In many cases, it had happened that we knew the same person, and we laughed and hugged. At Elelenwa at the advance for the final battle unto Port Harcourt, I had a chat with an artillery soldier and he said that he was from Iwo in the Western Region, then I said that I knew one Alade Lamuye and Abiola Ogun-dokun - oh, this soldier bust unto tears and shouted that I had just mentioned the name of his uncles. He broke down completely. It took about two minutes to calm him down. Then he went back to his artillery. We then all arrived at Port Harcourt with only one officer and eight soldiers dead. Later, to see these same soldiers suddenly mowed down through illegitimate orders by some incompetent and unreasonable officer, was painful indeed, and so I found it difficult to keep quiet whenever I saw what would hurt these men.

Above all, when things went wrong, it was either Akinrinade or Alabi-Isa-ma that would be called to sort things out. All day and night we had to clean up the mess created by others. So, as we saw it, we wanted things properly fixed; that was all we asked for. Well, jolted back to regimental reality, Akinrinade and I just consoled each other

and moved on. Today, with hindsight and gratitude to God, one should admit that Danjuma was right after all when he said, (about the Dimka coup), that those who stopped the coup should have taken charge of the situation, not those who ran away.

But the tragedy was and is that in Nigeria today, those who fought for democracy are not the beneficiaries; just the same way as those who actually fought and won the civil war remained unrecognised. It is also a travesty of justice that the same run-away fellow who came to benefit from the Dimka's coup is at the centre of this tragedy. God knows why, but the country continues to drift.



Obasanjo arrived Uli-Ihiala airstrip after the town and centre of gravity of Biafra had been captured in his absence.

Then when Col. Obasanjo finally listened and reasoned with the officers who had war experience, the war ended without his presence, at the battlefield as the commander, and it took only 23 days from December 22nd to January 13th; and not 30 days as already promised. He did not even know what was called a 'Command Post.' I was transferred to Enugu, just to avoid people saying that he was implementing my operational plan. So what! He was my commander. I thought that he would be pleased that I had a plan to show him in

the first place. Why then did he want to discredit me. He brought Lt. Col. Akinrinade to his HQ to be his deputy, that was fine. Moreso when more senior officers were there like Godwin Ally, Ayo Ariyo, and even our own classmate Lt. Col. Ignatius Obeya. Akinrinade told me that when Biafran troops initially surrendered to him at Amichi, Obasanjo was in his Port Harcourt office, some 300 kilometres or five hours drive away. He had no command post and he got lost looking for Amichi, and had left everything to Akin-rinade's discretion after his previous plans had caused so many untold hardships and casualties. Akinrinade was not even invited to the final surrender ceremony in Lagos. Till today, as far as I know, no family in Nigeria during and after the war got a letter or any information about how and where their children died or what their last words were, or where they were buried.

The Lost Evidence (Records)

Draft of a copy of a letter expected to be sent to parents of dead or missing soldiers in 3MCDO war front. This letter was expected to be written on the Nigerian Army Headquarter's letter headed paper or that of the Ministry of Defence.

LETTER OF CONDOLENCE

My Dear Chief/Alhaji/ Dr/ Mallam/Mr/
Mrs.....

Your son/daughter

I desire to offer you my sincere condolences on the death
of your

son/daughter,.....

.....

It is hoped that you may find comfort in the thought that he made the supreme sacrifice according to the highest traditions of the 3 Marine Commando Division of the Nigerian Army in defence of his country and to keep

Nigeria one and united. He was one of our best. May the Good Lord/Almighty Allah give you the fortitude to bear the loss.

Yours Sincerely,

Dated this.....of.....19.....

All we did was to send this letter with correct names and army numbers to Army HQ in Lagos for necessary action. We had furnished the Army HQ with personal records including the next of kin (NOK) of serving soldiers of 3MCDO. These documents were already prepared at Calabar before the advance to Obu-bra in February 1968. The 3MCDO ladies that kept these records were dismissed from the army on grounds of having been recruited for socials. As at the time of writing this book, I am not aware of any family in Nigeria that received such condolence letter from the Ministry of Defence in respect of their dead or missing children.

Talking about records, how many soldiers were recruited without a name and number, or how many more had been killed without the records of who killed them. We are in a country where nobody cares, even when relations die in the hospital, many never go back to claim them from the mortuary. **So, we fought a war in which no records were kept**, and nobody asked where their children died and what their last message to their parents or loved ones was. The consolation that people like me have, is the fact that God, in His mercy, has blessed me beyond my wildest dreams. He has also kept me alive to write this book to be able to put the records straight for posterity within the limits of my knowledge, while leaving the rest to history. The Holy Bible, *Ecclesiastes 12v/3-14* is relevant here. Above all, I was able to bury my very dear mother, like all mothers would want the end of their life to be celebrated.

At the time of writing this book, we have had 50 years of independence, and 40 years since the end of the civil war which was termed the war of unity. The question to ask is, are we now united as a people? My answer is 'no' because we are all still talking about unity. To me, that means that something somewhere is fundamentally wrong, especially in a situation where corruption is blatant and everywhere you look, there are beggars, some of them are very nicely dressed. Some are even in suits. This is in a country richly endowed by God with people and resources.

Talking about right or wrong people at the helm of affairs in the country, when Obasanjo became the Head of State after the coup that killed General Murtala Mohammed, he had to appoint a minister of finance for the country. We all know the importance of this to the economy and the wellness of the nation. However, here is a quote from Page 158 of a book authored by Olusegun Obasanjo titled, *Not My Will* which gave his reason or reasons for appointing Gen. Oluleye as Minister of Finance:

Prior to the coup that removed General Gowon from government Maj-Gen-eral James Oluleye had for some reasons, come to believe that he had attained such a position in the Nigerian Army that should any coup take place he would be informed and would automatically be invited to lead the new government.

When the coup took place however, it so happened that he had neither an inkling nor was he invited to the inner caucus that formed the government; not to talk of being invited to lead the government, his self confidence was dealt a mortal blow. He visibly lost grip on himself and his self assertion. So strong and overwhelming was this that he soon became perceptibly paranoid and developed a persecution complex.

The first noticeable symptoms of this were the several wild, unfounded and unsubstantiated allegations that he leveled against anyone that caught his fleeting fancy

It was obvious that a good officer was going to be lost to the machinations of his own complexes.

I pondered over this and consulted with his friends. I then concluded that he needed to be rehabilitated and helped to regain his self consciousness, self assertion and self confidence. The most pragmatic and result oriented approach was to give him a positive shock therapy by entrusting him with greater responsibility than he was shouldering. I was confident that once this dosage was carefully administered, he would bounce back to his old self. And he was a good officer. I moved him from Commissioner for Establishment and appointed him as Commissioner for Finance, and true enough, he gradually got a grip of himself and within a short time he was visibly becoming Maj-Gen James Oluleye of the old.

This was what qualified General James Oluleye to be appointed Minister of Finance, in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, not his expertise on the subject, for the good of millions of Nigerians. What Nigerians want is not any good leader or a strong leader. We just need a leader who will deal with all with the fear of God and who knows that people want justice, fair play and equity. Above all he must be intelligent enough to know right from wrong, not that he has the sole preserve of knowledge in all the affairs of the State. We also need a leader who knows that his term in office is limited and so is his term on earth. I guess that was why God in His Mercy also said that He is the Alfa and the Omega. Everything that has a beginning must have an end. We need a proactive and purpose driven leader.

Well, talking about justice, here is a clear example of how not to do it. After Gen. Murtala Mohammed was killed in Dimka's coup in 1976, there was so much traffic as people just abandoned their cars in the streets and ran. I had always had a boat to ride to work on the lagoon to the Ministry of Defence at the Marina jetty, where my office was. Admiral Adelanwa for instance, who was the Naval Commander with his official residence by the lagoon, had no boat, let alone one to go to work with. Thus, he came in my boat. With such problems of traffic in Lagos, which was a daily occurrence, it never crossed his mind to own one. Whereas, I was trained and brought up to take care of small things before they become big, and to plan for what is difficult while they were easy. I had a boat to use to work ever since I was transferred to Lagos, in case a situation might arise.

It was not a fire brigade approach. Knowing Lagos traffic, I never liked travelling to work by road because of heavy traffic which could cause my lateness to work like the day Gen. Mohammed was killed. There was a heavy traffic jam on that ill-fated day, and Gen. Danjuma, Colonel Domkat Bali, and Admiral Adelanwa found it difficult to get to work. Thus, in their wisdom they turned to me for the solution, and came to my house in order to ride with me in my boat, which they did with their orderlies.

We got to the office without any problem of traffic and without sweat. We eventually realised that the coup party had laid an ambush to kill senior officers whose route to work they had studied over time. So, we all missed the coup plotters' ambush by riding in my boat. There was to be a meeting of senior officers at Gen. Danjuma's office as the Chief of Army Staff, on that very day, and I was the Principal General Staff Officer. It was like permanent secretary of the AHQ. Akinrinade travelled from Kaduna where he was the General Officer Commanding I Division of the army, and was

already waiting in my office. He had arrived early to be able to beat the traffic jam of the day. Just as I entered my office and saw him, the telephone on my desk rang, and he answered the call. The voice was a lady's voice who thought that she was talking to me. She said that Gen. Murtala Mohammed, the Head of State, had just been killed and that I should get out of the office right away and that there was a coup in progress. Then Akinrinade handed the telephone to me. I spoke with Miss Dupe Abiodun who narrated the story all over again. We tuned the radio by my desk, and alas, it was Dimka announcing that there will be curfew from dusk to dawn and the usual story to go with it. We both went to Gen. Danju-ma's office to let him know what was going on.



My Boat that saved Danjuma, Adelanwa and Domkat Bali from being ambushed and killed in 1976 Dimka's coup.

Since Gen. Mohammed had been killed, we started looking for who was next. This was the greatest mistake of my life. Instead of allowing those loyal officers who crushed the coup to handle the affairs of the nation to which they were loyal, Akinrinade and I insisted that it must be the next in seniority; and that meant Obasanjo as the most senior in the army then. We started looking for him to take over

command but he was nowhere to be found. However, discussions between Ibrahim Babangida and Danjuma on the one hand, and Alabi-Isama and Akinrinade on the other were changing, becoming confrontational. Akinrinade and I warned that no one would hijack the coup without a fight; the next senior officer must be the next Head of State, and that was Obasanjo. But how could the senior officer who ran away during a coup against the government in which he was number two come back to lead those who put the coup down? Akinrinade and I sat down to think for a minute. We reasoned that this man, Obasanjo, might not like us, whatever we might do. Then Akinrinade said that we should just do the right thing, and that the army operates by seniority. Fine, I was ready.



Lt. Col. Omowa was Obasanjo's ADC at the time of Dimka's coup.



From left, Ita Giwa, Roland Omowa and Sani Bello at Port Harcourt. 3MCDO

I decided to stay with the others trying to put down the coup, while Akinrinade searched for Obasanjo. Just as we were thinking, we had a tip-off from Lt. Col. Roland Omowa who was then Obasanjo's ADC, had sent me a message about the whereabouts of his boss, that he was at the house of a chief. The chief was S.B. Bakare, a well known Lagos businessman. When Omowa was a major, he was my Public Relations Officer (PRO), when I was the Commander of 9 Brigade in Benin City after the war in 1973. He was also with me at 3MCDO. He is a very loyal and dependable officer. He knew me very well and what I was capable of doing in all respects including sports, military tactics and strategy. Omowa had been promoted to the rank of Lt. Col. and appointed Obasanjo's ADC. With that tip-off from Omowa, Akinrinade and I made a plan on what to do and how to achieve results by ensuring that the next senior officer would be safe from whoever might be planning to bump him off. Then we decided that Akinrinade would lay ambush around Chief S.B. Bakare's house to ensure Obasanjo's

safety while I would handle the rest since I could speak Hausa and could keep abreast with the goings-on. Col. Ibrahim Babangida was ordered to take armoured vehicles and marry with the infantry under Maiyaki and get Dimka at the radio station in Ikoyi where he was announcing his curfew messages.

Babangida got there, saw Dimka, got his weapon, and advised Dimka to run away instead of arresting him. I was furious and started being suspicious of the situation, as that action alone was a court-martial offence. I sent a message to Akinrinade through Cpl. Isa, my orderly, on a motorcycle to be prepared for war if the coup was to be hijacked by anyone or by any group for that matter. Most of the coup plotters were well-known officers to me like Rabo, Joe Kasai and Clement Dabang who were NMS students while I was tactics instructor there in 1962/63. As a matter of fact, I recruited Rabo into the army in 1962. He was thirteen years old when he entered NMS. They spoke with me nicely and allowed me to take control of the situation in Bonny Camp, while in the meantime, Akinrinade was patrolling Chief S.B. Bakare's house should anyone attempt to kill Obasanjo with a view to hijacking the coup. Finally, we all took control, and the coup failed. So, Obasanjo went back home to the government house. Well, here is an excerpt from a book titled, *Not My Will*, authored by Olusegun Obasanjo at page 29.

I went home to my residence at about 5 o'clock, in a car which Chief Bakare had very kindly provided and put on my uniform. Major General Alani Akinrinade came in later and escorted me to the meeting.

What did he think Akinrinade was there for? Was Akinrinade his orderly or ADC? He (Obasanjo) did not

appreciate what we went through to get him there. I became Danjuma's enemy ever since; Danjuma was right, after all.

The conspiracy: Tide turns against me after Dimka's coup

With the coup over, Obasanjo became the Head of State. Danjuma who was my classmate and friend, who was to be ambushed on his way to work, but was missed because he rode in my boat suddenly became my enemy, and we never saw eye to eye again after the Dimka coup. So did Adelanwa. Only Domkat Bali still remained on talking terms with me. I was wondering what went wrong or what I did wrong. *Ah ha*, it was because we did not allow the coup to be hijacked. We regretted that though later on, because we realised that Danjuma would have been a better Head of State. Nigeria has been drifting ever since with so many activities but no results. "Motion Without Movement." Anyway, I was too busy, to appreciate how deep the enmity was. Obasanjo, in his wisdom, needed Danjuma as a northern officer to enable him to rally northern support for him. He had to tell Danjuma a story about Alabi-Isama and Akinrinade with reference to what happened during the war at the 3MCDO with Adekunle.

So Danjuma started behaving differently to me. Akinrinade they could tolerate to some extent. Once again, like at the war front, my enemy, of course, became his friend. So, Danjuma and Innih became my enemies and automatically became Obasanjo's friends. When I realised that, I got myself busier building a 'Qualitative Army' while they got on with politics and oil wells. Obasanjo looked for everything to get me. Well, get me for what? But I had since been ready. Then like every loser, who did not know what to do, he allegedly advised that a letter be written to me by Danjuma to ask why I travelled abroad with my wife. Some of his staff, for one reason or the other, passed information

to me through my staff officers. These officers and men just loved me and passed information to me daily on the goings-on and their discussions about me in their offices. I thanked them all. I was so furious that I went to Danjuma's office to ask what that was about? I told him that my wife was not an employee of the Ministry of Defence, so why should I not travel abroad with my family who did not travel with government warrant anyway? Indeed, what was their interest in my wife? I think my answer was more than enough for the brewing trouble, so they backed off, and had to look for another trouble. They had waited until I went abroad for a conference to ransack my office, looking for what could implicate me.

Bid to nail me begins

To them, it had to be money. But they did not know me well, as money had never been my problem. Yoruba adage says, "*Ayo tile re wa kii pe hi*," Meaning "the one who has home satisfaction does not know hunger". I thought that Danjuma knew me well, as we joined the army the same day and went to England for training the same day. On the day of our departure at Ikeja airport in Lagos, my mother was not sure who was to pay for my ticket to UK and I told her that the government had paid. She was not sure who the government was, so she gave me £100.00 (one hundred pounds) to pay for my fare should anybody ask for my ticket like when travelling by train, over and above other monies she gave me for the trip. When we got to school in Aldershot in UK, and nobody asked me or any of us for the cost of our tickets, we went shopping with Akinrinade and Bamigboye. A good suit at the time with Burton Tailors in London was £10.00 (ten pounds). Akinrinade then went on to Sandhurst Cadet School, while I remained at Mons Officers Cadet School with David Bamigboye. So, we went to officers' shop to buy our suits from Moss Brothers at Convent Garden for

£50.00 (Fifty Pounds) each. When we got back to the school and other students saw us in the best suit money could buy from the officers' shop, they were amazed. David Bamigboye just threw his Nigerian suit sewn in Zaria by one 'Capable Chuks' inside the dust bin at Aldershot railway station.



Standing by my first car in 1960 — a Ford Consul.



My wife posed with the car.

This same Danjuma knew that while also in England my mother was sending a tin of what we called "KLIM" milk full

of *Gari*, sugar, and fried chicken daily for the six months of our training, and we ate with other foreign and British cadets, and we called it Nigerian pudding. It arrived daily on VC-10 flights from Nigeria. The slogan then was, "Dinner in Nigeria, breakfast in London". He also knew that when we were cadets in training, my mother bought me a bicycle, and I was the only one that had one. (There were not many families in Nigeria and in Kaduna in particular that had a bicycle). He also knew that the day we arrived back in Nigeria, and were posted to 3rd Battalion at Kaduna together, my mother bought a car for me from one Major Hoyle, a British officer for £100.00 (one hundred pounds), and I was driving everyone to the night club at Kaduna. He also knew that my mother married for me and brought the wife to Kaduna and they were my friends with David Bamigboye as well, and that I already had four sons by the time the war broke out in 1967 while Danjuma was not yet married.



My wife and children posed for this picture in 1970 after the end of the war.



Alabi-Isama, first right, and my bicycle as a cadet at NMTC in 1960.

He also knew that when the Army did not approve of my marriage on the presumption that I was too young, and would not be able to maintain a wife on the salary of a second lieutenant, nor could it approve a married officers' quarters for me, all of them laughed at me. But my mother went and bought me a house at Kaduna C7, Market Street, where my wife lived with her, while I still retained my single quarters at the barracks. My mother also supplemented my army salary with £40.00 (forty pounds) monthly from when we came back from England until we went to the Congo. Money had never been my problem. I was raised to be excellent and honest. I must never tell a lie and I must deal with everyone with the fear of God — (*Omoluwabi*) and nothing else. My mother had always told us that whatever money or property that God did not give us, the devil would take and there were many ways that the devil could take such money or property.

We also went to the Congo operation together with David Bamigboye. How could he not have known me very well, I wondered. I was told when I returned to Nigeria that the account held in "G" Branch of the Nigerian Army, where I was the head, had been overdrawn. It was impossible. Not with me as the head of that office. I therefore, set up an investigation headed by Lt. Col. Odeka of the Army Pay

Office to advise me on how the account was overdrawn. Odeka then wrote a report that it was an entry error by the officer in charge of the accounts in my finance department. That also was laid to rest. Then another letter came again that I should explain why I travelled outside Nigeria without authority of the Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Danjuma. I knew I got all necessary travel documents signed before I travelled abroad; I knew that the letter was initialed by the Director of Military Intelligence, Lt. Col. Sam Akinola, but we could not find the file in my office, let alone find the letter of authority to travel. I felt insulted. I got annoyed and resigned from the army with a letter dated May 24th 1977, reference NA/PGSO/PER/1.1 could not stand the insult, more so, when my family was involved. I am one of those who believe that the greatest betrayal is the one that comes from a friend.

Telephone / 50520

CONFIDENTIAL

HEADQUARTERS,
NIGERIAN ARMY,
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE,
LAGOS,
NIGERIA

Ref. No. NA/PGSO/PER/1

Chief of Army Staff,
Headquarters,
Nigerian Army,
Ministry of Defence,
Lagos.

34/1024 1977

VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT OFFICER
(N/142) BRIG G ALABI-ISAMA

1. I humbly and respectfully request the Chief of Army Staff to approve my voluntary retirement from the Nigerian Army with effect from the 21st March 1978 which will be my 10th year of service in the Army.

2. I do not have a particular reason then to say that I want to go into farming which the country is now calling her citizens to do. I like challenges and I have farming as one. It however will sound ridiculous that a Brigadier at age of 37 is retiring to farming; but it is the wish of my heart, and another way of serving the Nation at this hour of her need in that field.

3. If approved, I would wish that I should have an order study from now on with a view to handing over on or about 21st of December 1977 to enable me go on terminal leave from then on.

4. I will like to suggest if I may, that Brig F. Eronkoko be appointed Principal General Staff Officer as I think that he will definitely be able to cope and continue with the process of building a qualitative Army.

5. I thank the Chief of Army Staff for giving me the opportunity to serve him and the Nation.

I remain
Your Obedient Officer,

[Signature]
BRIG G ALABI-ISAMA

My letter of resignation from the army dated 24th May 1977.

SECURITY CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE - DOMESTIC SECURITY
OFFICIAL

NAME : G. ALARY - ISAMA RING
 F/REGUL NO : N/182
 UNIT : AIRC N.A. MARTINA LAGOS
 DATE :

THERE IS NO ADVERSE SECURITY INFORMATION AGAINST THE
 ABOVE-MENTIONED OFFICER. HE/SHE IS AUTHORIZED TO TRAVEL TO
 THE U.S.A.

BETWEEN : 04TH MAY, 1977 AND 15TH MAY, 1977
 FOR THE FOLLOWING REASON(S) : NIGERIAN ARMY DELEGATION TO U.S.A.
 MILITARY TRAINING

ADDRESS WHILE ABROAD : U.S. D.S.P.A. HEADQUARTERS OF NIGERIAN
 WASHINGTON D.C.

PASSPORT NUMBER : 00755
 DATE/PLACE OF ISSUE : 10TH NOVEMBER, 1976 LAGO
 NO. 1

NO WEAPON OF ANY KIND WILL BE CARRIED

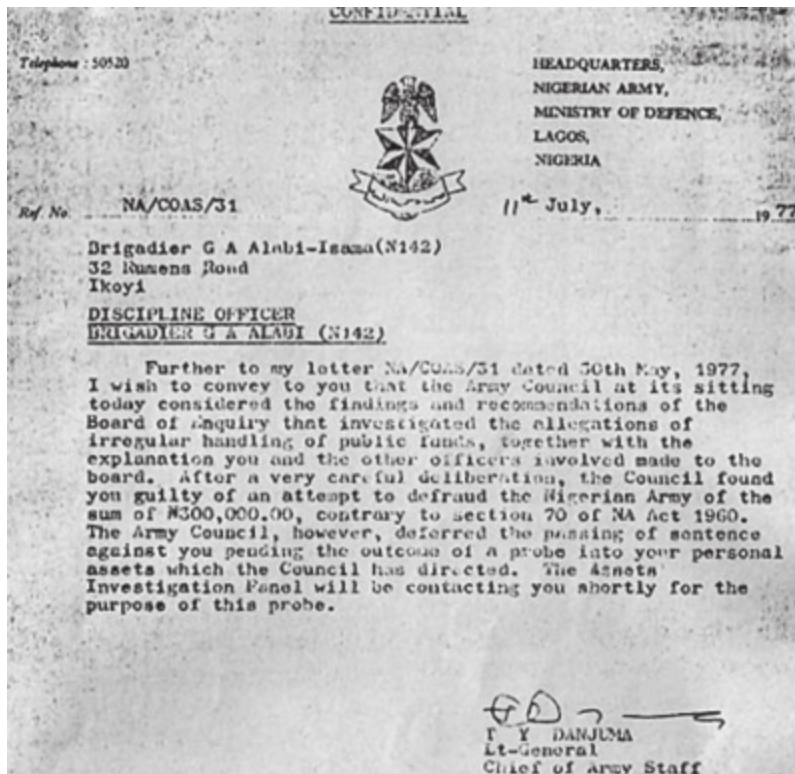
DATE : 03 MAY 1977 AUTH: X1/270/188/G(88)
 DTG 04TH APRIL 1977



DIRECTOR OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

THIS IS NEITHER A PASSPORT NOR A VISA. IT IS MERELY A PERMIT
 TO TRAVEL OUT OF THE COUNTRY

Missing Letter of Authority to travel found by my secretary.



Here is the letter dated 11th July 1977.

The letter must have stunned Obasanjo and Danjuma, because of the way they both reacted to it. I am very happy that Danjuma knows better today that he had been used in all respects and when he was no more useful, he was dumped. The third day, I realised that I was not going to leave without a fight, especially with a whole file getting missing in my office with all the letters in it; without which I was in real trouble, especially the letter of authority to travel outside Nigeria. Lt. Col. Sam Akinola also conveniently could not find his file copy. I think that it was at this stage that my secretary, S/Sgt. Alfred Irubor came to my house to tell me about the whole story about the file.

From a tip-off from Danjuma's secretary, who overheard a conversation between Danjuma and Lt. Col. Sam Akinola, the Director of Military Intelligence, my secretary made a copy of the said authority letter to travel abroad, which was initialed by Akinola himself on May, 3rd 1977,

Auth:NA/220/188/ G(SD)DTD April, 24th 1977 and hid it before the file got missing.

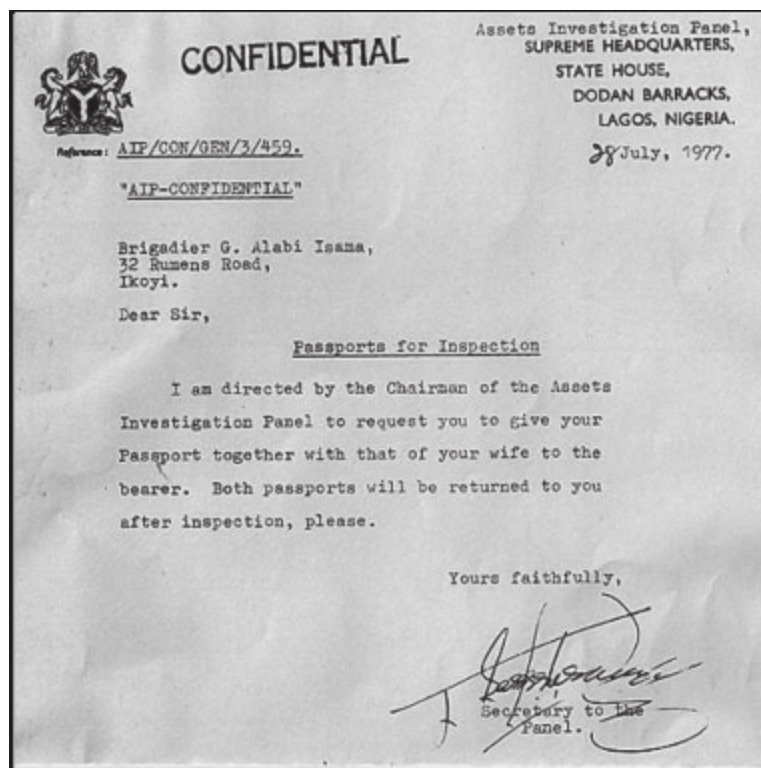


Alfred Irubor, Secretary to Col. Alabi-Isama (PGSO) who had helped keep copies of the missing letter.

When the story was getting more serious, Alfred made a hundred copies of the letter and distributed them to all members of his family in Benin City and across the country for safe keeping. I asked if he truly had the letter, and he answered, "Yes sir." Alfred went and brought a copy, which I showed to Danjuma. Once again, he was stunned. Then on May 30th which was sixteen days after my resignation, another letter reference NA/COAS/31 was sent to me, signed by Danjuma himself, that he got an anonymous letter from someone that I kept a total sum of three hundred thousand naira (N300,000) with Col. Tijani, the Acting Paymaster of the Army. In an already polarised army, I, Alabi-Isama, kept the money that I wanted to steal with an Hausa officer paymaster called Col. Tijani? But the money was found in Col. Tijani's office, and in his safe.

Tijani was told to come and give evidence against me which he refused. He came to tell me all he was told to say which he refused. Col. Tijani died under mysterious circumstances on the third day. Before then, an officer in my

office called Capt. Bamidele, who played soccer with me for the army 1st eleven, and whom I had transferred to the Army HQ in Lagos to be GSOL 11 (Sports), to handle sports planning specifically, wrote me a letter, which had nothing to do with his portfolio. Well, I thanked him for his concern, and his interest in letting me be aware of what was happening around the office, but was not in his portfolio. I praised him for his loyalty, and invited him to lunch. I then went abroad for a conference, and ordered that his points would be looked into on my return from my overseas trip.



Supreme IIQ letter requesting for my passport and that of my wife.

When I returned, I ordered a meeting based on his memo to me dated May 2nd, 1977, reference NA/230/73/G(FIN); Capt. Bamidele then came to me to explain why he wrote the memo and that he was advised by some senior officers to write the letter and that I should notice the reference quoted which was that of the finance department and not that of his own portfolio which was sports. He gave me a

complete run down of the situation in the Army HQ since Dimka's coup, informing me that they did everything possible to rope me into the coup, until Dimka was captured. Dimka made the statement that he did not tell me about the coup because I had quarrelled with him.

Dimka was asked why I quarrelled with him. It was then that Dimka told them that I took him to Madrid in Spain, for World Military Sports Conference as secretary. He lost my new camera in a taxi in Madrid, which I had just bought. Since then I quarrelled with him because my mother always wanted to have pictures of places that I travelled to around the world. So, I explained to Bamidele that on that trip, I could not show my mother any picture to which in Yoruba language she said, "*Oluwa ki ofi ofo ra emi.*" That translates literally to a prayer seeking material losses instead of life. Well, I insisted on having the name or names of his advisers, to which he refused. I ordered that the meeting should go on anyway, and the minutes of the meeting be recorded accordingly. Just three days later, Capt. Bamidele was picked up from his office at the AHQ, that he knew about Dimka's coup, and was ordered to be shot, and indeed he was shot dead along with all Dimka's coup conspirators.

That silenced Bamidele forever. Then on June 15th 1977, which was 21 days after my letter of voluntary retirement, another letter referenced HQ/NACMP/ 121/1G, which was initialed by Col. P.C. Tarfa himself as 'President NARE-org Fund Investigation Team,' asked me to answer why a sum of N300,000 (three hundred thousand naira) was authorised by me to be withdrawn from sports account in cash, which was the same money on which an anonymous letter was said to have been written and which was with Col. Tijani. All these go to show the length to which some people will go when looking for means or evidence to implicate you. There was no day I did not get a letter either from Danjuma or Supreme HQ since my letter of resignation. Thank God that I had loyal

staff in Maj. Akan, Capt. Okuribido, Maj. Madaki, Maj. M.C. Alii, Maj. Godwin Abbey and my secretary S/Sgt. Alfred Irubor, and a good record of events, which I learnt from the good old British days in the army. Danjuma initialed another letter dated July 11th 1977, reference NA/COAS/31 on behalf of the Army Council for a public probe to my personal assets. That also was done and I was clean.

There was no way I could have money somewhere or in my account, unaccounted for; my mother herself would have called the police. Let me recount one such incident after I returned from the Congo operations in 1962. I had been away for about six months and my salary was paid into the bank as the United Nations fed and paid us allowances in the Congo. When I returned to Nigeria, I gave my mother £600 (six hundred pounds) from my saved salaries.

She was shocked and asked where I got the money from. I explained but she was not satisfied and wanted to call the police, but for one of our neighbours, Mrs Elizabeth Jacobs of the P&T who then explained the situation again. She thought I must have stolen the money because before then, she supplemented my salary with £40 (forty pounds) monthly to help sustain my new wife and I.

New NIGERIAN No. 3,581 SATURDAY, 12 AUGUST, 1977 TEN KORO **BEREC IS BEST**

EDITORIAL

Attah of Igala's suspension

One of the principal aims of Local Government Reform is to bring the government nearer to the people and generate development at grass root level. From recent developments however, it seems the commendable aim of the LG reforms is being misinterpreted or misunderstood. We have at the back of our minds the suspension of the Attah of Igala from office. The issue involved is very sensitive and deserves to be handled with utmost caution. Basically, the immediate cause revolves around the creation of traditional councils in Igaland. Some people have advocated for 'four traditional councils, one each for Anapa, Bapa, Dapa and Isha, a situation which would appear to enhance the authority of the Attah to lead alone when he should be seen as the traditional ruler of the whole Igaland. A meeting of some Igala

Brig. Alabi-Isama RETIRED

Gaddafi, Malloum to meet in Lagos

A TOP LEVEL meeting between the Libyan leader, Col. Muammar Gaddafi, and the President of the Republic of Chad, General Félix Malloum, is expected to be held in Lagos next week. The meeting which will be presided over by the Head of State, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo, would mark a momentous milestone in the border conflict between the two countries.

Olubadan installed

The Military Governor of Oyo State, Brigadier David Oluwalanmi, yesterday in a formal ceremony installed the traditional ruler of Oyo State, Oluwalanmi Oluwalanmi. The ceremony was held at the Oluwalanmi Oluwalanmi.

NEW NIGERIAN, Tuesday, 16 August, 1977

Oyo govt to purge cult members

From **YINKA DAGUNDURO, Ibadan**

ANY public servant in Oyo State who is found to be a member of a cult, or who is found to be a member of a cult, will be removed from office. This is the policy of the Oyo State Government, which has been announced by the Military Governor, Brigadier David Oluwalanmi.

Malam Ahmadu said this would also help to check the ever increasing cases of anonymous letters received at the prisons headquarters.

Brig. Alabi-Isama not retired—APRD

BRIGADIER Godwin Alabi-Isama, Principal General Staff Officer of the Army Headquarters in Lagos, has not been retired after all. A statement in Lagos yesterday by the Army Public Relations Department (APRD) said: "The true position as it affects the officer is that some allegations have actually been made against him."

"As a result," the statement said, "the Army authority is investigating these allegations with a view to taking appropriate action."

The department appealed to news media to always endeavour to confirm their stories from authorised sources before publication.

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M2 AHMADU BELLO WAY, KADUNA.

TEXT FOR TODAY

The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God shall stand forever.

Isaiah 40:8

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE, TEXT-BOOKS AND STATIONERY ARE AVAILABLE AT THE CHALLENGE BOOKSHOPS

As if that was not enough, a letter came from Supreme Headquarters, reference AIP/CON/GEN/3/459 dated July 28th 1977, ordering me to submit my passport and that of my wife. I did, and they found out that I did not travel with my wife after all and if I did, so what? Why then did they try to discredit me and my family? Then on Saturday August 13th 1977, 80 days after my letter of voluntary retirement, a newspaper published in the northern part of Nigeria, *The New Nigerian*, carried a front page news publication of my

retirement from the army, and on Tuesday August 16th 1977, in a small column, it published that I was not retired after all. All these letters were after my resignation letter dated May, 24th 1977.

They just wanted to embarrass me. They were so confused, they were not sure what next to do, and how to go about it. I just walked away, and nobody asked for me and I did not care to look back ever since. If I were these people, I would have marked the N300,000 (three hundred thousand naira) money, and got the police and all the intelligence agencies to follow the money to its final conclusion and destination. They probably were not intelligent enough to know that. So, once more, they lost. Many more letters came which may be exhibited soon at the appropriate time, may be during the launching of this book for people to see what is called "Injustice" in our country and the extent some leaders will go with fallacy to actualise their aims. Many officers including Col. Ibrahim Babangida were kind enough to come to me to ask me what was going on, to which I had no answer. Officers were dying mysteriously as soon as they refused to witness against me about what they did not know.

Col. Ibrahim Babangida was very concerned and I am sure that he discussed the issues with Gen. Danjuma. He never came back to me again. However, what came next is more interesting than all the quoted letters put together. An official *Federal Government Gazette* published in Lagos and dated December 22nd 1977 was printed about me. I wonder how many of us had read a Federal Government Gazette in the past many years. When the army looked for me and could not get me and in order to justify all their actions, they threw their last dice, and again they lost.

Some of the staff of Obasanjo and Danjuma sent me many more letters including the *Federal Government Gazette* published about me. They were sure I would end up a

pauper. Not a chance. No wonder my USA company in 1985 did a project titled, "Message Switching System" for NITEL in Nigeria. My company was recommended from USA as I also installed the one at Maraven in Venezuela. Engr. Otiji was Managing Director at the time when the project was completed at Lagos and Kaduna. David Mark was the Communications Minister then. At the time of writing this book, Satcom Limited had not been paid and a total sum of US\$9 million had to be written off when the cost of chasing the money by our accountants and I was like reinforcing failure. I ordered the write off of the money. Alhaji Datti was NITEL's accountant then while Alhaji Yahya and Isaiah Mohammed were the engineers. Where is NITEL today? For me, it could not have been better. This will be reopened at the appropriate time.

The gazette was published. I had no problem with that, but here are my questions in order to keep the records straight for posterity. I had since moved on strongly regardless, and The Good Lord has been faithful.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette No. 59, vol. 64, published in Lagos on December 22nd, 1977 put my name as Brigadier G. A. Isama (N142), which corresponds with the name in the letter initialed by Danjuma was referenced N A/CO AS/31 dated July 11th, 1977; whereas the letter from the Supreme Headquarters had the reference AIP/CON/GEN/3/459 and was dated July 28th, 1977 addressed me as Brigadier G. Alabi-Isama.



Federal Republic of Nigeria

Official Gazette

No. 59

Lagos - 22nd December, 1977

Vol. 64

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CONVERSIONS				
Department	Name	Appointment	Post to which converted	Date of Conversion
Ministry of Establishments	Aiyegbusi, Miss M.	Clerical Officer	.. Stenographer	.. 24-9-76
	Oyeniran, Miss A. O.	Clerical Officer	.. Stenographer	.. 11-3-77
	Quadri, Miss O. A.	Typist, Grade II	.. Stenographer	.. 11-3-77
	Sotiyo, Miss F.	Clerical Officer	.. Stenographer	.. 24-9-76
LEFT THE SERVICE				
Department	Name	Appointment	Date of leaving Service	Reason for leaving Service
Ministry of Communications	Ehienyie, S. A.	.. Senior Plant Officer	.. 19-12-77	Retired
Ministry of Economic Development and Reconstruction	Okon, Mrs A. E.	.. Senior Typist	.. 1-8-77	Resigned
Ministry of Establishments	Zinsou, J. P. M.	.. Assistant Executive Officer (General Duties)	24-9-76	Withdrew
Ministry of Information	Olurebi, Miss A.	.. Clerical Officer	.. 12-10-77	Resigned
Ministry of Internal Affairs	Chukwu, O. I.	.. Typist, Grade II	1-12-76	Resigned
Ministry of Labour	.. Okonkwo, M. C.	.. Typist, Grade III	.. 13-6-77	Resigned
	.. Oviassu, O.	.. Clerical Officer	.. 20-9-76	Resigned
Ministry of Works	.. Amangbo, Miss F.	.. Technical Assistant	.. 18-10-77	Resigned

Government Notice No. 1195

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE—NIGERIAN ARMY

DISCIPLINE—OFFICERS

The following details are notified for general information :

Brigadier G. A. Isama (N/142)	..	Tried by Court Martial and found guilty of offences related to public property.
Punishment : Dismissed from the Nigerian Army with effect from 18th October, 1977.		
Colonel A. Tijani (N/344)	..	Tried by Court Martial and found guilty of offences related to public property.
Punishment : Dismissed from the Nigerian Army with effect from 18th October, 1977.		

E. A. Oguntona,
for : Permanent Secretary,
Ministry of Defence

Lagos, Dated this 5th day of December, 1977.

Nigeria that I served with the best part of my youth published a fake gazette about me. Obasanjo led Federal Government lied in this gazette. This is a boloney!

These people just stressed themselves up unnecessarily. It is so nice that General Danjuma also did not expect what happened to him in the hands of the man he swore to go on exile for, if he was not voted president of the country. Were all these worth it? My simple questions are:

- Where did the court martial take place, in Nigeria or abroad?

- b) Who was the judge? A Nigerian or a foreigner?
After all, the Nigerian Army has a procedure for courts martial.
- c) What were the charges against me ?
- d) Who were the prosecutors?
- e) Who were my attorneys, if any?
- f) Where are the proceedings of the court-martial?
- g) Was the money actually lost?
- h) Was the money stolen?

To be fair to these people, they did not say that money was stolen or lost. They simply said that I attempted to steal the money but it was found intact at the Hausa paymaster's (Col. Tijani) safe in his office.

The gazette said that I was found guilty of an offence related to public property. What was the public property in question? I guess that the N300,000 (three hundred thousand naira) was government property. Fair enough, but where did the court martial take place, and who was the judge that gave the ruling?

Was the money lost or stolen?

If stolen, by whom?

The pity of this is that we tend to see other people as a reflection of ourselves. (*"Ole lo mo ese ole to ni ori apata."*)

There may be many of you that are going through less or worse situations like this one out there in various forms or ways. You are not alone. I survived it to be three score and ten (70) years old at the time of writing this book. I was only 27 years old in 1967 at the war front, and 30 years old when the war ended in 1970. It was only by the good grace of God that I survived, and I am still kicking and strong, in fact, very

strong. His grace is sufficient for me, says the Holy Bible. I survived. I was 37 years old on the date of the fake *Federal Government Gazette* in December 1977. Obasanjo was head of state. When my mother took me to Justice Elias on this subject of leaving the army, it took him over an hour to stop talking about how he was retired by Obasanjo-led government. Then he said, "Alabi, if you have a job to do, go ahead and do it or we can find you a good job. Be careful about that man." I have since been very careful.

As at the time of writing this book, from Mrs Ransome-Kuti, to Dele Giwa, to Pa Rewane, to Harry Marshal, Alhaja Suliat at Ibadan, Bola Ige, a former Minister of Justice, to Funsho Williams, just to name a few, had been assassinated. That is why we need to celebrate that I am now 70 years old and just had a son Aduralere, he is two years old now. My first grandson Oluwafemi also just graduated from the university, is married and is blessed with my first great grandchild. The Lord has been very faithful to me.



With my children and grandchildren at my 60th birthday in Houston Texas 2000. Alabi-Isama wearing Christmas hat is seated third from left.

Once again, I recall what Mr. Ifije, the prison superintendent at Kirikiri said in 1967, when I was his guest

there. He said that God did not promise anyone a smooth sailing, but promised those who are His own a safe landing. As a sportsman, I know when it is half-time and full-time in a game of soccer and I also know when it is extra time before the referee will blow the final whistle. I made the three scores and ten and I am still cool. I am not in a hurry to quit the stage. All these people wanted to do was either to embarrass my mother, or to discredit and dishonour me. They lost again because, I am that general who might have lost his honour and I did not even know that I did. Many military officers and civilians trooped to my mother's house at Palm Grove, some bringing documents, gifts and some just to discuss what happened.

When I got abroad, many of the international observers that were in Nigeria during the civil war who visited my HQ at Uyo, who later met me, were very helpful and kind indeed, as they were shocked when they heard the story and read some documents related to my problems in the Nigerian Army. They (International Observers) introduced me to many businesses and to business people in their various countries.

This one is interesting. During June 12th, 1993 national crisis about Chief Abiola, my telephone rang in Houston Texas, where I was resident at the time, and it was Mrs. Stella Obasanjo on the line from Washington D.C. I had been a family friend of the Abebes before Obasanjo married Stella. My wife is from Ishan like the Abebes.



International observers at my Sectors 3, Uyo, 1969 (From left) Maj. Gen. A. Raad Swedish Rep; Mr. Olssing UN Rep; Lt Col. G. Alabi-Isama; Gen. Harfmann; Col. O.Alfons Polish Rep; Col. G. Ally.



Lt Col. G. Alabi-Isama and Col. O.Alfons Polish, Rep.



Lt Col. G. Alabi-Isama and Maj. Gen. A. Raad, Swedish Rep.



Mr. Olssing U.N. Rep and Lt Col. G. Alabi-Isama.



The rear view of my house in Houston, Texas, where Mrs Stella Obasanjo came to visit in June 1993. She loved sitting by the swimming pool.



15th January 1970. The civil war ended, I was back in my mother's arms.

She told me that General Obasanjo had travelled to Lagos, and that she would like to come to Houston with four of her escorts to see me and for the weekend. That was fine and she was with me and my family for seven days instead of the weekend she had wanted. It was a very good visit as we were able to talk about Nigeria and the goings-on. I told her that I was sure that she did not come without General Obasanjo's consent, which she agreed. They all heard that I was doing well in Houston, and thought that they should come to see me; for which I thanked her and her entourage, despite the fact that my name was given to all intelligence agencies all over the country and around the world as a bad person to be watched. I said that with five bedrooms and baths, 'chopping life' was the next. With my neighbour and his wife, Jack and Mary Jo Gonsoulin, we all had a good week with Stella Obasanjo and her entourage. I am sure that the story of my happy stay and business in Houston had gone round, and probably, many of them could not believe it. But I was happy that they came, as I was expected to be a pauper. That was why I was denied gratuity and pension.

"Won se bi ola ti tan. Teni begi loju, igi a ru'we."

In the Holy Bible, *Job 14 vs 7* is relevant. We also read Psalm 118 many times, and discussed it.

I also told her that once more I have seen the goodness of the Lord. It is true that with God, who can be against you and that I made it, I made three scores and ten, Praise The Lord. Let's all go and give thanks to The Lord, for He is good and His Mercy endureth for ever.

My mother, Alhaja Jeminatu Ajiun Isama will be too pleased to see me, and to hug me one more time in the bosom of The Almighty. The Lord has been faithful indeed.

Can we have unity in Nigeria?

Can we have unity in Nigeria? The answer is, “Yes, of course.” I am an optimist. However, the greatest forces I know that can rule and move this country forward will not be a ‘do-or-die’ politics or military strength. It will be morals and spirituality based on the material forces that presently rule our minds and our country. I know that it shall be well with the righteous, says the Lord. Without justice, however, peace may be difficult.

As it has come to pass, 40 years after the civil war in which over two million people died, some maimed till today — blind, paralysed and confined to wheelchairs, — we are still talking about unity and corruption. Was the war worth it? If not, did they die in vain? Something is definitely fundamentally wrong. Did you or your family come out better, or did the country come out better?

What was the outcome of the civil war?

Let us look at the immediate causes of the civil war, which are still with us till date. This is the problem of disunity, political instability, and lack of economic growth. Unfortunately, we all missed the point, as what we need to do is to address the remote cause or causes a lot more than the immediate causes of the issues at stake. What are these causes? They are not for this book.

This country needs to put institutions of unity in place and it is urgent. We only need to improve on our morals. Whether we sit down to talk or stand up to fight, either by resolution or revolution, this land will outlive all of us. We also need to know and to appreciate the fact that our term in office is limited and so is our term on earth.

Like the situation in the final battle for Uli-Ihiala when some units of 3MCDO went the wrong way with the commander, and the Pincer team refusing to join them, thus ending the war in favour of the latter, we need to do that now and right away. We have been taking the wrong way in

this country for too long. Let us all turn around and get on the right path for progress and prosperity.

All empirical evidences point to the fact that this country will not break up. The thieves and the corrupt ones also know that if the country breaks up, they will become broke. The long and short of it is that we must keep away from this corrupt generation. The Holy Book also said so in *Acts 2 vs 40*. Our geo-politics is the best for any country to take off. We have great manpower, good economy, and great land mass. What else could we ask the Almighty Jehovah for? The only thing is that we have no common purpose, no vision, and so missed the AIM.

In 1958,¹ I was a fourth year student at Ibadan Boys' High School. Two students from each secondary school were taken on a seven-day excursion round the Western Region, in order to appreciate the efforts of Chief Obafemi Awolowo's government at governance and the welfare of the people. At the end of the tour on the seventh day, the chief himself who was the Premier of the Western Region of the country addressed the youth, numbering about fifty. After explaining why he did all we had seen, which included free and compulsory education, free medical, seven shillings and six pence minimum wage for workers when the federal government was paying only five shillings minimum wage for workers, the first television in Africa being tested to start operation the next year in 1959, the cocoa house which was the tallest building in the country at the time, and many more, then the chief said that with all these, with schools everywhere, including teachers' colleges and roads, the state had no more surplus money anywhere for anyone to steal. THERE WAS A VISION, THERE WAS PURPOSE AND, OF COURSE AIM.

A. We may just start with a detailed psychological profile of our future leaders.

B. Instead of all the high sounding words of geo-political zones, or the creation of more states, just simply do the following:

- i. Create two and only two political parties and no more. This will unite the geo-polical divide and make people feel a sense of belonging. This two party system works very well in the USA. Each party should let the people know what they stand for, what ideological province do they belong to. eg. Federalism or Unitary.
- ii. Put true federalism back in place. Afterall, Ironsi was killed for installing unitary system of governance.
- iii. Put true fiscal federalism in place. Oil is not the only thing to depend on forever. Each state has its own minerals. Develop them including agriculture or give oil blocks to states not individuals, checkout and see the individuals who have oil blocks.
- iv. Put citizen right in place. You are a Nigerian anywhere you are. Vote and be voted for where you are born.
- v. Have state police to enable the state control security affairs - The State Governor should control the security of the state.
- vi. The federal police will still be there but seconded on tour of duty from the states for a suggested term only. Seriously develop the police for internal security and the military for exteral security.
- vii. Reform the Judiciary so the rule of law really prevails.

- viii. Reform the electoral system so that elected leaders are accountable to the people not their sponsors.
- ix. Sports and its infrastructure should be in place supported by both the states and the federal government. Sports training is scientific and its results are political. Discourage quota system in sporting and other aspects of life and living.
- x. Put the institutions of women's affairs in place not for socials and jamborees but for empowerment and leadership.
- xi. Immunity in our public life is wrong. Let us be held responsible for our action or inaction
- xii. Many lost initiatives and ingenuity are brought about by the monthly federal government handout tagged 'allocation'. Let each state stimulate its own economy, generate its own funds for its development. There will be competition, innovation and improvement in all respects- not monthly allocation.
- xiii. Start the means of production not the means of destruction. Farm tractor production was killed because of importation. Car assembly plant was killed because of our preference for imported ones. Importation of second- hand clothing killed all textile industries and cotton factories. Lets get real.
- xiv Presently, we import more than 50% of our food. Yet we have the land and the farmers. Get the farmers to work instead of licence to few like the oil blocks. Stop importing what we can produce like rice.

xv. We have crude oil, we have the capital and land
- stop importing petroleum products. It is silly to do so.

xvi. Restore the life of the middle class. Since 1977, the middle class had been trampled upon. They are broke and broken through the following:

- a) the indigenisation decree;
- b) the cassava planting project;
- c) the crash of the stock exchange due to corruption;
- d) the crash of the banks due to corruption;
- e) importation of petrol, oil and lubricants (petroleum products);
- f) importation of second-hand clothings which killed all textile mills;
- g) importation of foreign cars which killed our car assembly plants;
- (h) thieves getting away with loot and killers get away with murder, while the youth learn only from thieving elders.

All these and more had killed the middle class. How can we, as a nation, grow without them? Whether you sit down to talk or stand up to fight, the next fight, if any, will not be Nigeria-Biafra war. Therefore, sit down to talk now on important issues not which tribe should lead. A true leader of the people will emerge eventually by competition, not by handicap.

The one single factor that made Biafra lose the war was the fact that they alienated the non-Ibos in their Biafra. Who then is Biafra? This country will find it difficult to move forward with economic growth, or political stability in an atmosphere of chaos and war. This is the easiest country to

govern because everybody and every tribe wants to rule. What you need is competition not handicap. It is only competition that can bring improvement and development.

Bits and pieces of the war explained

In November, 1967 after the capture of Odukpani North of Calabar, Adekunle and I sat down for two weeks to work out the strategy and plans of 3MCDO Division at the Atlantic theatre of the war based on our orders and assigned responsibilities from AHQ. We arrived at the following and stuck to them like an agenda.

- a. To cut off Biafra by sea to the outside world and complete the sea blockade on the Atlantic coast. Bonny and Calabar were already captured. We then had to capture towns along the coastline on the Atlantic Ocean between Bonny and Calabar i.e Oron, Eket, Opobo and Finima to finally control the Atlantic coastlines from Lagos to Calabar.
- b. To cut off Biafra from the land route to the outside world. This was one of the reasons why we advanced from Calabar to take Ugep and Obubra and to close Nigeria/Cameroon border at Nssakpa/Ikom route in February 1968.
- c. To cut off Biafra from the air to the outside world by capturing Calabar and Port Harcourt. Their third airport at Enugu was already captured by troops of I Division of Nigerian Army in 1967, at the start of the war.
- d. When we heard in June 1969 that Biafra had built new airfields at Uga and at Uli-Ihiala, we had to make a new plan to take the two airports as well.

e. Adekunle knew all these but when he got to Lagos after the capture of Port Harcourt, he announced OAU (Owerri, Aba and Umuahia) to the press when asked about where next to capture. These were not part of the objectives for achieving the AIM of ONE NIGERIA. These were not necessary to be captured to win the war. If we really wanted OAU, however, a new plan had to be made but he launched the tired troops all the same and it ended in a disaster and also became the beginning of the end of his own military career in the Nigerian Army. This change of plan helped Biafra to bounce back; but rather than the Biafrans looking for the 3 MCDO centre of gravity at Oron, which could have made the entire 3MCDO Division to collapse, but Biafra looked for towns like Owerri and Port Harcourt. They also wanted to win battles rather than the war.

f. Biafran economists also did not anticipate the strategy in currency change. All their purchases of food and weapons were backed up by Nigeria's foreign reserve. So, Nigeria changed its currency. This was a very brilliant move by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The information for the change of currency was leaked to Ojukwu who loaded two plane loads of Nigeria's currency to Switzerland. *New York Times* of January 15th 1968 reported that more than 20 tons of Nigerian bank notes were flown into Switzerland in two chartered planes. But it was too late. They never were able to achieve results.

The currency change also affected Adekunle as much as it affected Biafra. Adekunle flew in to Port Harcourt from Lagos in June 1968 and had a quarrel with some navy and Nigerian Air Force officers. He sent for me to brief me on his concerns. Nigerian currency that had been changed in Lagos between

January 3rd to January 22nd 1968 which also was still legal tender in the war zones only allegedly found its way into Calabar area through some of these men. Adekunle was not a crook and was not going to allow that to happen and he was hated for that. I also believed that apart from his war front problems, the currency issue compounded his problems. Whoever it was who in Lagos and those interested in the old bank notes, looked for a way to get him. They finally succeeded. Because of one problem and another, Adekunle was changed as the commander of 3 MCDO which eventually brought in Col. Obasanjo as the new commander of 3 MCDO. We were all shocked when Obasanjo arrived in Port Harcourt on 16th May, 1968, took over command of 3 MCDO and his first order was to pay full salary to troops in the war front. Well, he had to do that by paying the salary of troops with old currency or coins which was the only legal tender in the war zone in which case the troops could not send their money home to their families outside the war zone or pay with the new currency. How could the salary be sent home anyway. This was what Obasanjo termed the ingenuity of the troops in his book — *My Command*. Chief Awolowo as Finance Minister did not allow spending the new Nigerian bank notes in the war zone. So, the relationship between Obasanjo and Awolowo became strained but the military had its way and more money came to the war front. In the meantime, Adekunle was finally changed. I did not stay longer than three months after Obasanjo's takeover of 3MCDO, that I was also changed and transferred to I Division at Enugu. I knew too much. That also was the beginning of the end of Chief Awolowo in the military cabinet; and when he said that he was going to probe the military if and when he became the president of Nigeria during his political campaign tour in 1978, he knew what he was talking about. Obasanjo, of course, had become the military Head of State in Nigeria.

The military never allowed Awolowo to get to the position of president of Nigeria and perhaps this was his destiny. One thing led to the other, and here we are forty years after the civil war, we are still in search of unity while corruption thrives and as second-hand clothing became the order of the day, all textile mills have collapsed. To me, this is tragedy after victory in the battle fields. The war was fought, in the first place, to correct these ills.



From left, Shitu Alao NAF Commander, Adekunle GOC, 3MCDO, a visiting naval officer and Alabi-Isama at Umukoroshi, Port Harcourt, in June, 1968 to discuss the issue of old currency in 3MCDO area.

3MCDO source of information on Biafra

In order to know what was happening inside Biafra and to enable us plan our strategy appropriately as we had no official intelligence report to work on, we had to obtain news from American, British and French media as the federal government propaganda efforts were poor and had no intelligence outfit inside Biafra other than our own efforts.

For example, while Ojukwu was looking for countries to recognise Biafra in May, 1968 before Kampala Peace Conference, the Federal Government of Nigeria continued to redouble their military efforts and Port Harcourt was captured before the conference in May 1968.

Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Gabon and Haiti recognised Biafra while 3MCDO troops advanced faster covering about 480 kilometres in 30 days. Many of the officers, including Major George Innih hated me for pushing them so hard and I know that I had pushed all the troops beyond the limit of fatigue. But for victory and the success of our strategy and plans, there would have been an open revolt. To make matters worse, Adekunle returned to the war front after 51 days of absence in which the troops had captured all Biafra territories of Oron, Uyo, Abak, Etinan, Eket, Opobo, Bori, Aletu Eleme, Abonema, Buguma, Ahoada, Elele, Obigbo, Ekeffe, Afam power station and Igrita just to name a few, including Port Harcourt. Adekunle did not appreciate what we did and wanted the troops to do more without a rest or refitting and without a plan. That was also the beginning of the end of Adekunle. The troops were tired indeed, and morale dipped.

Apart from the blunder of the incursion of Biafra into the Midwest and the Western Region; the failure of which boosted the morale of the federal troops and which made the federal troops to continue to believe that Biafra and Ibos in particular were pushovers many more blunders followed in the background and underbelly.

The very effective Biafran propaganda soon turned against them when the people heard slogans but nothing to back it up. For instance, there was the boasting by Ojukwu that all the Ibos should return to the East during the unrest in the North in 1966/1967 and that no power in black Africa would be able to defeat them. It was only a speech and nothing to back it up. There were no weapons to fight with and no food for the stomach. When a determined soldier starts to cry, it is all over for morale.



A Biafran soldier. He has had enough.

The evacuation of natives by Biafran troops from their villages without food and shelter was a blunder. The villagers then went looking for food and found it with the federal troops and so they deserted in great numbers to the 3MCDO operation area. *New York Times* of October 21, 1969 reported that anti Ibo feelings heightened in 'liberated areas.'

Some diplomatic problems for Biafra

The pictures of skeleton kids filled the international media. That made many to sympathise with Biafra abroad and donations in money and food poured into the Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland, for the starving children of Biafra. Then by Sunday, May 11th 1969 *New York Times* reported that Biafran troops attacked Kwale on Friday April 9th 1969, in the Midwest, led by Lt. Col. Nzeffili and captured 27 European oil workers. One Italian escaped to tell the story. Now then, who were the contributors to the relief efforts of

the International Red Cross? These were European countries and Caritas of the Roman Catholic Church. By Sunday June 1st 1969, *New York Times* further reported that Biafra had condemned 18 foreign oilmen to death. Ten Italians were found dead, one Jordanian and the rest were Europeans. Their bodies were recovered.

Ojukwu then faced international diplomatic challenges by allowing the oil workers to be tried in the first place let alone to be condemned to death. Italy and Germany appealed to Biafra and the Pope sent a letter to Ojukwu. To make matters worse on June 6th, 1969 *New York Times* again reported that Nigeria shot down a Red Cross plane. Everybody went cold in Europe and elsewhere. The starvation propaganda started to work against Biafra. Much earlier on August 17th, 1968, Mr. Robert Goldstein an international public relations officer for Biafra had resigned in protest against Ojukwu's handling of the food issue for Biafra.

OPEN LETTER OF RESIGNATION TO ODUMEGWU OJUKWU

(Published in the Morning Post, Lagos, August 17, 1968)

FROM Robert S. Goldstein

Public Relations Representative of Biafra in the United States

As your Public Relation's Representative in the United States, it is my distasteful duty to tender my resignation based on the following points: **Point 1** - In November of 1967 when we met in Umuahia, you and your Cabinet were very impressive. You told me of the woes of your little Republic, that thousands of people had died, were dying and more were prepared to die for freedom's sake.

You and your Cabinet told me you believed world opinion would help your cause if you could get your story across.

You expressed the opinion that very few, if any, people in the United States knew of the plight of the Biafrans.

You asked me to tell the world that Britain had teamed up with Russia in a conspiracy with the Federal Government of Nigeria to murder every Ibo in Biafra. You suggested I use my talents to induce the press to write about the Biafran side of the war, as at that time all news came out of Lagos.

You will recall I did not take the assignment that day but stayed on several days before deciding to take that job.

To help win the peace

At that time I stated to you and your cabinet that I was taking the assignment making it crystal clear I would try my best to help win the peace not the war.

Point 2-1 immediately arranged the first world press conference in Biafra inviting the US press as well as journalists and television people from England, France, Switzerland, Africa and other parts of the globe. This was the first news breakthrough. I arranged regular trips into Biafra for the world press, helped set up stringers, etc., so that your statements and the statements of your cabinet would be heard.

At that time, I was absolutely positive you were right and your cause was a just one in the best interests of the free world and your countrymen.

Point 3 - Finally, the Republic of Biafra was recognised first by Tanzania, then quickly followed by Gabon, the

Ivory Coast and Zambia. Our public relations work was paying off, world opinion was starting to side with us.

Peace talks were arranged at Kampala. I thought that if anyone walked away from the table it would be the federal government. But to my dismay it was Biafra that left the conference. After all the fighting and killing, I knew that peace would not come easy but I could not understand leaving the peace conference until the last point was negotiated and the avenue explored.

Point 4 - Then urgent telex messages were received from 'Biafra' telling of tens of thousands of people starving in the refugee camps, the villages, the bush country - stating if something weren't done in the next few months over a million women, children and aged would be starved to death. I immediately contacted the press, urgently petitioned the State Department for action on their part. Food, medicine and milk were sent to the only available ports open for immediate shipment to 'Biafra' via land routes through Federal and Biafra territory, under the auspices of world organisations such as the International Red Cross among others.

Then came the incredible answer from 'Biafra' that land corridors could not be acceptable until there was a complete ceasefire, and that an airlift was the only solution to feed the starving.

You then appeared before the various Heads of State and representatives of the OAU at Niamey in Niger. I fully expected you to, at least, accept the world help that was offered your starving throngs. However, you delayed, hoping to use these unfortunates with world sympathy on their side as a tool to further your ambition to achieve war concessions at the upcoming peace talks in Addis Ababa. Thus innocent victims continue to perish needlessly of

starvation, the most agonising death that can befall any living creature.

Point 5 - This was incredible to me. I am now convinced that I have been used by you and your cabinet to help in military adventures of your origin....using your starving hordes as hostages to negotiate a victory. If at some later date, following the issuance of this letter, you do concede to allow a mercy land corridor...would you expect me to agree to espouse before the world press the incredible delay of your decision. What explanation could I honestly give for the needless prolongation of this horror?

Inconceivable acts

I pray this communication may, in some small way, influence you to move affirmatively, allowing the mercy land corridor to be born. It is inconceivable to me that you would stop the feeding of thousands of your countrymen (under auspices of world organisations such as the International Red Cross, World Council of Churches and many more) via a land corridor which is the only practical way to bring in food to help at this time. It is inconceivable to me that men of good faith would try to twist world opinion in such a manner as to deceive people into believing that the starvation and hunger that is consuming 'Biafra' is a plot of Britain, Nigeria and others to commit genocide.

Point 6-1 cannot, in all conscience, serve you any longer. Nor can I be a party to suppressing the fact that your starving thousands have the food, medicine and milk available to them it can and is ready to be delivered through international organisations to you. Only your constant refusal has stopped its delivery.

I am this date, tendering my resignation and am returning to Mr. Collins Obih of the African Continental Bank all the

fees you have given me (Letter of Credit No. 354 \$400,000 US.)

I have sent your representative in New York a Bond in the amount of 800.000 pounds that I was holding in your behalf. I have also, this date, sent the Bond of 200,000 pounds issued by the Central Bank of Nigeria back to them for disposal.

Point 7-1 am now convinced that one Nigeria is the only solution to peace. I also call upon you Mr. Ojukwu to allow your starving people to be fed. Their well-being is of deep concern to me as well as other right thinking people of the world. Your acting in the utmost haste in this matter is, in my opinion, the first step toward any lasting peace in your country.

When Akinrinade captured Aba, those that were in the city were those who had no more strength to run as they were hungry. They were shocked to see us feeding them and the captured Biafran POW troops. Many came openly just to thank us. All these were explained to Adekunle, but he did not see the point.

While with us in the war front, Adekunle was different. Anytime he travelled to Lagos, he came back different. At Lagos, he talked to the press (radio, television, and newspapers) foreign and local media. He would return with newspapers with stories where he boasted that he would kill all Biafran soldiers that will stand on his way. I guessed that was what people wanted to hear to sell their newspapers; but while back in the war front, he wanted us to feed them and re-kit them into 3MCDO.

Trips to Lagos did many things to this great leader. For example, it was when he came back from Lagos after 51 days absence, (during which period we captured Port

Harcourt), that he threw the bombshell that there were too many Yorubas in his command and with that he destroyed the powerful institution that he had built. He regretted it, and that was the beginning of the end of his military career. As soon as he dispersed his officers, his wings were clipped, he was never able to fly again. His adversaries were pleased. With all he did for Nigeria during the civil war of 1967-1970, he was forgotten. He was never invited to any of the country's independence celebrations or for the Biafra's surrender, or for an award. His name and that of his officers, men and the 3MCDO as a military establishment during the civil war in Nigeria are only remembered like a monument to a bad idea.

As if that were not enough, *New York Times* again reported on July 7th, 1969 that Britain would hold Ojukwu responsible for any relief failure as he refused daylight delivery of supplies rather than at night. With this, many European countries began to think that they were reinforcing failure and withdrew their support for Biafra tactically and started to support Nigeria to end the war quickly and reduce suffering of the civilian population. In the same *New York Times* of July 7th 1969, Gen. Gowon boasted that Biafra was doomed and wanted an early crushing of the rebellion. Then came Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the former president of Nigeria, also an Iboman and leader, who was said to have composed Biafra's National Anthem. He withdrew his support for Biafra. Associated Press carried a story on Thursday August 28th, 1969 that Dr. Azikiwe said that Biafra charges that Nigeria sought to exterminate the Ibos, a cock and bull fairy tale; and advised Biafran rulers to forget what he termed, "Their Puny selves". Dr. Azikiwe then attributed starvation in Biafra to faulty planning by Ojukwu and his staff.

In the meantime, Lt. Col. Utuk of 3 MCDO withdrew from Owerri. Rather than Ojukwu starting a peace move at that

time when he had a brief military success and his Minicon air force team led by one Count Von Rosen, a Swiss, were making waves and achieving results, he wanted to continue the war by all means. So, 3MCDO Division of the Nigerian Army also re-doubled their efforts to end the war by all means even though the troops were tired.

Why the war lasted so long

The Nigeria-Biafra civil war lasted from July 1967 to January 1970 when at the 3MCDO, we had planned for the war to end before or by the Christmas of 1968. With Col. Benjamin Adekunle as the General Officer Commanding (GOC), it was speed all the way with sleepless nights and restless days. We all had planned that we should be home for Christmas with fireworks not bullets and bombs. From January 1968, for 30 days we had captured all of the Cross River State of today. Within another 30 days from April to May 1968, we had captured today's Akwa Ibom and Rivers States. The Biafran troops were shocked.

The plan was working so far and the next was to receive fresh supplies before or by July 1968 and head on to Uli-Ihiala the new centre of gravity of Biafra. The expected supplies did not arrive and the GOC who had been away on this mission of gathering supplies for 51 days from April 1968, came back with nothing and as if that was not enough, he ordered the capture of Owerri Oguta and Aba (OAU) because he had made a promise to some pressmen at an interview while in Lagos. He changed the plan and ordered for the accomplishment of what we did not plan for and what we were not prepared for—above all, the tired troops who had trekked a total of about 480 kilometres, fighting all the way from Calabar to Port Harcourt through the mangrove forest and endless river crossing were not given a respite to regroup, refresh and rest before the OAU plan.

So, there was set back at Owerri, Aba and at Ikot Ekpene where the Biafran troops had recovered from their shock and mounted a counter-offensive against the division. However, these had been expected and there had been plans to counter these moves which were exactly as thought of. These took another two months from May 18th, 1968 when Port Harcourt was captured to July 1968 to solve the problems. However, the unplanned Aba and Owerri took longer. Aba was captured in September and so was Owerri while we lost Oguta completely. 3MCDO has never had such a set back. The situation was strange to us. Our inability to keep the momentum from May 18th 1968 when Port Harcourt was captured gave the Biafran troops time to regroup and to mount a counter-attack.

As one problem mounted on the other, Adekunle was changed as the GOC and Col. Obasanjo took over a year later on May 16th, 1969. We had lost a year already with mounting casualties, aimless activities and planless moves.

Col. Olusegun Obasanjo's entry was in itself another disaster as he also started mastering the job and with all sorts of un-informative moves and terminologies spent a good part of six months condemning all the work, the plans and the efforts of his predecessor from May 16th, 1969 to November 1969 including the dismantling of the institutions of success built by Col. Adekunle. In the meantime, we packed in more casualties, the troops were idle at Calabar, Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Aba and Port Harcourt while casualties came in hundreds from Owerri front; as the Biafra troops tried to regain the initiative. Little did we know that the new GOC, Col. Obasanjo just did not know what to do and was too shy to say so. Therefore from May 18th 1968, there was idleness in all the other sectors except Sector I at Ohoba and at Owerri, where over a thousand 3 MCDO troops had been counted dead and many more wounded and captured. By the 7th month of inactiveness except of bickering and

incompetence, the Pincer team comprising of Lt. Col. Akinrinade, Majors S.S. Tomoye, Isemmede and Ola Oni pitched their command posts and without informing their confused GOC, advanced as already planned on December 22, 1969 holding their operation pincer 2 maps and plans headed to Uli-Ihiala the Biafra centre of gravity at the time, and in exactly 23 days on January 13th, 1970, the Nigeria-Biafra civil war ended when Biafran officers and men surrendered to the pincer team.

Therefore, the time from May 18th, 1968 until January 13th 1970 were wasted period and with many more casualties, the type never experienced by 3 MCDO. In order to further explain the situation more graphically, I therefore embarked on Part 3 of this book which is an expose of the book written by Col. Olusegun Obasanjo titled, *"My Command"* which of course is the book written on his stewardship from May 16th, 1969 to January 16th, 1970 as the GOC of 3MCDO Division of the Nigerian Army. In order to retake Owerri, Biafran troops had to thin out of Umuahia to reinforce Owerri. Owerri was too close to Uli-Ihiala. Owerri was, therefore, defended with all they had. If Col. Obasanjo had listened to military strategists like us, the war would have ended in August/ September 1969. We got intelligence reports that Biafran troops thinned out of Umuahia to reinforce Owerri. He was advised to implement Operation Pincer 2 in which 3 Sector of 3MCDO was to move to link up with 1 Division at Umuahia which they had captured in April, 1969.

Umuahia became Biafra's fulcrum from where the eastern part of the remaining Biafra at Arochukwu would swing with the western part at Uli-Ihiala. It took Obasanjo six months to see that and not until over 1500 troops of 3MCDO had died. He was pre-occupied with the idea of paying full salary to troops in the war area, rest area for troops and looking for Gowon's picture at Port Harcourt airport and picture of the

governor, instead of the national flag which I personally put there. He still did not see the strategy or understand the plan until Akinrinade and the dream team of S. S. Tomoye, Ola Oni and Isemede went for both Umuahia and Uli-Ihiala while they tied down Biafra's reinforced Owerri troops with artillery fire and constant harassment by patrols. Ojukwu accepted that the fall of Umuahia was because his troops had been spread too thin and an unusual imaginative Nigerian attack plan had caught the Biafrans by surprise. This was reported in the *New York Times* of April 26th, 1969.

Part 3 of this book therefore will show how the war was extended only for trivials, and incompetence as casualties continued to mount.

The final battle (Final execution of Operation Pincer², please see the map on page 379). How the war was won

The planning of Operations. Pincer 1,2, and 3 has been discussed. I will explain here how Operation Pincer 2 was finally executed when the officers were tired of line straightening operations which yielded no positive results except more casualties. Since all the units were already in position and battle ready, the final battle started. As early as 6.00a.m. on December 22, 1969, 17 Brigade under Maj. S.S. Tomoye fired the first shot. He advanced to the right flank in order to be able to link up with 1 Division troops who had been at Umuahia since April 1969. This was what was expected of 13 Brigade, but he did not move because he was not part of the line straightening operation. And since Akinrinade had decided to advance without 13 Brigade, he did not bother.

The gap between Owerri and Umuahia was important because the Biafran troops that were dislodged by 1 Division at Umuahia had not settled down to defend their new locations. They also did not expect the move between the

gaps. They were expecting that the old conventional, mundane tactics of hitting one's head in a frontal attack as in Ohoba and thence to Owerri was what would happen. They, therefore reinforced and tied down most of their troops defending Owerri for a showdown with 3MCDO. So, they dug-in at Owerri. It was expected to be the mother of all battles at Owerri.

16 Brigade commanded by Maj. Utuk, who was still itching to take vengeance on Owerri was not allowed to advance, while 19 Brigade commanded by Maj. Aliyu was in defensive position to tie down Biafran troops at Owerri. With devastating massed 122 mm artillery bombardment, directed at Owerri and Ohoba, the Biafran troops had no more doubt that 3MCDO was coming again to Owerri and they were ready.

Then 15 Brigade commanded by Maj. Iluyomade, who liked to salute like Hitler, moved brilliantly into the gap between Oguta and Owerri to the left from Omoku, capturing Izombe, with Orashi River to his left which later flowed right to his front. That again further confirmed that 3MCDO would try to go back to Oguta. Biafran attention was consequently directed at Oguta and Owerri axis, while 14 Brigade commanded by Maj. Ola Oni to the left, and 12 Brigade commanded by Isemede in the centre advanced through the gap between Owerri to the left, and Umuahia to the right.

At this time, 13 Brigade commanded by Maj. George Innih had moved right to the wrong direction from Ikot Ekpene towards Itu to what Obasanjo called passing through operation to capture Arochukwu. That distance alone is about 150 kilometres on a very bad road. To use Obasanjo's phrase in his book, he was to "swing left towards Umuahia". That distance is another 150 kilometres from Arochukwu, and another 150 kilometres or more to Uli-Ihiala, the

divisional objective. 90% of these men were on foot across enemy lines.

When Akinrinade did not see him for four days, they continued the advance without him and his 13 Brigade. On my birthday, December 24th 1969, Akinrinade and Tomoye linked up with 1 Division at Umuahia. They greeted me on my birthday and told me that it was my birthday present. That was cool, but I was biting my finger, wishing I was on the advance with them. We were running a commentary like a soccer match. On Christmas day, December 25th, 1969, I sent a message to the COSA in Lagos to say that Obasanjo went to Arochukwu and so did the 13 Brigade with about 3,000 men going the wrong way. COSA then sent a signal message to Obasanjo to concentrate on Uli-Ihiala and nowhere else. Obasanjo then wrote in his book that he wondered how COSA knew about his move to Arochukwu. By the time he got the message, Akinrinade had ended the war by capturing Uli-Ihiala. At this time, with Inyilogugu to their left, 12, 14 and 17 Brigades under Akinrinade's command (The Coordinator) then had 1 Division at Umuahia to look after their right flank, which made the advance faster without having to wait any more for 13 Brigade. Akinrinade did not have air support, because the Count Von Rosen inquiry was still going on in Port Harcourt.

By the 5th of January 1969, 14 Brigade was at Amaraka, 12 Brigade was at Umuna, while Tomoye's 17 Brigade passed through to take Umuzoma, and Urualla. My war room at Enugu was full of officers of 1 Division listening to the operation on radio and how I was marking the map as they advanced. From the right flank, the 'Dream Team' was threatening Orlu from two flanks, having crossed Imo River, and were to enter Uli-Ihiala by nightfall.

By Thursday of January 8th 1969, Tomoye described the situation that they were not firing anymore, as there were

too many refugees and too many Biafran troops just dropping their weapons and running, while some managed to enter their vehicles and drove fast away from the war front. They told all those that raised their hands up in surrender to just go home. They did not capture any POW. Casualties were light on both sides. Artillery could not be used beyond Owerri because of the enveloping troops from 12,14 and 17 Brigades that were already behind enemy lines. By morning of Friday January 9th, 1970, Tomoye radioed to say that he thought the war was over as the Biafran troops were not fighting anymore. I was filled with joy Beware of stray bullets, I shouted, and I asked after Maj. Innih. Tomoye had heard that his troops were at Owerri. I trusted that Akinrinade would not allow troops to enter the towns, which is why he warned Edet Utuk to remain in defence, and not enter Owerri. With his annoyance over what happened during the seven-month siege, Utuk, might have the temptation to kill for vengeance.

Very early in the morning of Tuesday January 13th, 1970, a Biafran officer called Achuzia, with white handkerchief, crawled towards 17 Brigade position, and was captured and taken to Lt. Col. Akinrinade. He introduced himself as Col. Achuzia, and that he was sent by Gen. Effiong and all the officers of Biafran Army to surrender to the commander of the federal troops and to invite the commander to come and meet the Biafran officers somewhere few yards away, where they had gathered to surrender. The town was called Amichi, and that they were all waiting at a house there. At first, Akinrinade did not want to go but later he agreed and Maj. Tomoye with Ola Oni accompanied him. Before they left, they left orders with their troops that if in two hours they were not back, or nothing heard from them, the entire place must be levelled to the ground.

So, they left with Achuzia whom we had wanted to kill in Port Harcourt if we got him, for killing Chief Halley Day, the

owner of The Silver Valley Hotel at Port Harcourt. When we were young officers, before the war, Akinrinade and I used to travel to Port Harcourt to stay at the Silver Valley Hotel because we were friends of Chief Halley Day's children. Akinrinade then remembered that we should not kill anyone that looked at us in the face.

Akinrinade then told him that we were looking for him and that the meeting that they were going to should be worth it. Achuzia took Akinrinade and Tomoye to a house nearby, where they met Achuzia's European wife, and Achuzia broke kola nuts with the usual Ibo traditional welcoming ceremony. Well, so far so good, after which they then went to meet all Biafran officers seated and waiting to surrender to the two officers-Akinrinade and Tomoye. Akinrinade met all of them including some of our classmates like Gbulie and others. It was then that Akinrinade sent word to Obasanjo that Biafran troops had surrendered to him and his men in case he would like to come and see. I was still on the RS301 Operation Radio with some officers of 1 Division, listening to our commentarylike discussions with Tomoye's radio operator.

It was thereafter that Obasanjo, the GOC of 3 MCDO started looking for his officers. He got lost and did not know the road to Amichi and how to find his officers and men that sent for him to come and see. It took him four hours to drive from Port Harcourt to Amichi. By the time he finally got to Amichi, they had all dispersed to meet the next day. The Pincer Team was in charge and in control. Here is how Obasanjo described the situation when he got lost in his book. *My Command*, page 124.

Page 124, para. 2

On reaching Uga airfield without seeing my two officers, I turned back. Very near Orlu, I met a junior officer who claimed that he knew which way the two

officers had gone. He led the way while I followed. Soon we met the two officers feeling rather happy and elated and pleased with themselves. They told me they had just met Effiong and a group of rebel officers and civilians and had arranged a further meeting with me for the following day.

Questions

- a. Was the GOC at the attack?
- b. Did the GOC know where he sent his officers and men as to follow a junior officer leading the GOC on the battle field?
- c. Did the GOC know where he sent his coordinator as to be looking for him in the middle of nowhere, with all the battle noise amidst thousands of refugees?
- d. Was the GOC correct in claiming in his book that Akinrinade's men did not know him as he wrote in his book *My Command*?
- e. The GOC in his staff car stopped to ask a junior officer where Akinrinade and his officers were. Adekunle never went into an attack in a staff car, but on foot with his troops. Could Gen. Collin Powel of the USA Army advancing to capture Baghdad have stopped somewhere to ask a junior officer where Gen. Schwarzkopf was?
- f. Where was the rendezvous that he gave Lt. Col. Akinrinade in his final plan?
- g. Was there a plan in the first place that he gave Akinrinade to operate with?
- h. Did the GOC know the deployment of his troops at that time as to be looking for their

whereabouts? This was how Col. Obasanjo, the GOC 3MCDO demonised Alabi-Isama, the planner of operation Pincer 2 and Akinrinade, the executor of operation pincer 2 for his glory.

Operation Pincer 2 was the plan

a. The plan divided the remaining Biafran enclave into two with Umuahia as the fulcrum.

b. The Biafran troops at Arochukwu panicked after loss of contact with their main HQ at Uli-Ihiala.

The Biafran troops at Arochukwu were demoralised, and removed their uniforms and fled. That action in itself reduced their casualties, and because of Lt. Col. Simon Uwakwe, (see page 30) 3MCDO never, and I say, never attacked Arochukwu. God knows that Uwakwe had suffered enough.

d. We did not have to capture Owerri to get to Biafra's centre of gravity — which was Uli-Ihiala. Obasanjo did not know that.

e. There were less casualties on both sides, as those Biafran troops who were waiting for the mother of all battles at Ohoba and in Owerri, did not have the opportunity to vent their venom on 3MCDO troops, as they were surrounded on all sides, and could not use their weapons. It was a 'Dilemma Strategy' in a double envelopment. Either way they lost. Owerri became their 'death knell,' where Biafran troops fired their last shots. Col. Obasanjo wrote about 13 Brigade operation when they finally showed up at the objective as follows on page 113 of his book,

Page 113, para. 2

My Command: By the time 13 Brigade was able to commence the advance from Awomama on January 11 Ojukwu had as early as January 8 realised that the noose was drawing round him.

My Command Page 113

Comment

The point was that Obasanjo was not there to know that Awomama is 12 o'clock of Owerri and 6 o'clock of Uli-Ihiala. The battle for Uli-Ihiala ended from 3 o'clock on the right flank, and 9 o'clock on the left flank. Therefore, since Akinrinade and his men were already at Uli-Ihiala and beyond, 13 Brigade was far behind at Awomama, on January 11th, 1970, which was about 20 to 30 kilometres behind the main force. That was the position of 'The Best Fighting Force' of the 3MCDO which I built as 13 Commando Brigade purposely for the final battle. George Innih and his men must have covered about 400 kilometres in just four days. But for victory that boosted their morale, they would have arrived spent and unable to contribute meaningfully. They lost many of their officers and men including Capt. Gagara.



The first day, Col. Obasanjo took this picture at Uli-Ihiala in office dress. Tuesday January 13th, 1970.



The next day, Col. Obasanjo in combat dress to meet Effiong. Wednesday January 14th, 1970.

My Command Page 110, para. 2

This is how Obasanjo described 13 Brigades operations for the final battle on page 110 of his book, *My Command*.

It is pertinent to emphasize that 13 Brigade which was clearing up the Arochukwu/Ohafia enclave was earmarked for the last leg of the operation. The reasons were that it was one of the best-organized brigades in the Division at that time, it was the largest one, with six battalions and adequate troops reinforcement and replacement, and, as a result of its size, it was better equipped than the other brigades.

Comment

The point made here has shown clearly how the prosecution of the war was incompetently and inefficiently handled since May 16th, 1969 for six months until the war ended in January 1970. What was expected to end in just 30 days from May 16th 1969 took 180 days.

a. Col. Obasanjo did not know why 13 Brigade in my Sector 3 was the largest and the best-equipped at the time. I explained to him that Oron was our centre of gravity, (which was a strange language to him), and that the defence of Oron was more important than any part of 3 MCDO operation area. Sector 3 was also the largest with 12,13, and 18 Brigades under my command, while other sectors had only two brigades each under command. Please see page 53, paragraph 3 of the book: *My Command*. This Sector 3, had the largest and the longest stretch of frontage from Azumini to the west and Cross River to the east. The depth was from the Atlantic Ocean to the south and Ikot Ekpene to the north a distance of about 200 kilometres each as the crow flies. The defence plan for Oron was like the plan Russians successfully used to defend the port of Sevastopol on the Black Sea in 1943, during WWII at the Crimea against Nazi Germany in three defensive layers. Obasanjo did not get it. I was too much for him, and so, he was getting irritated by all these. That was also why I took charge of the counter-attack of Ikot Ekpene when Biafran troops broke through the first line of our defence plan there in June 1968.

b. Then he earmarked 13 Brigade which he confirmed was the best, for the last leg of the operation. It is not done in the infantry where your best will only do the mopping-up while the rest did the fighting.

Concluding therefore, this was what made Akinrinade attack Uli-Ihiala with such annoyance, and with only 12,14 and 17 Brigades of Isemede, Ola Oni, and S.S. Tomoye to end the war and threatened to shoot George Innih when he saw him. It was not Innih's fault. He only obeyed orders, from

a commander who was learning on the job in the war front. In the meantime casualties mounted on both sides.

Those who were no good, according to Col. Obasanjo, had ended the war, and Col. Adekunle, the protagonist, did not reap the reward of his labour. He won many battles, but not the war. **It was the tragedy of victory.** Adekunle missed the grand strategy.

The Nigeria-Biafra war, was a war of unity for the country in order to keep Nigeria one, and a war in which about two million people reportedly died, only that we could not count the many numbers of unknown soldiers. But for the fact that our national census is still disputed, the number could have been more. As at the time of writing this book, the unity that we fought for still eludes us.

Did the over two million Nigerians die in vain? It was because we allowed the undersirable to become our superstars and national role models. The military ruled Nigeria and Col. Obasanjo also had the opportunity to rule Nigeria. Nigerians are still talking about unity, corruption, and the lot, since 1966 of Nigeria's first coup. Did this country come out better than where we started from? Which of the families did? Then take a look around and see those that benefitted from the chaos and the tragedy. They still cause trouble because it is from the chaos that they benefit. Nigeria, like Obasanjo and George Innih's 13 Brigade, is still going the wrong way.

LONG LIVE NIGERIA, AND ALL OF YOU GOOD PEOPLE

Part Three

EXPOSEEE ON OBASANJO'S "MY *COMMAND*"

Introduction

The book entitled *My Command* by General Olusegun Obasanjo, I am sure, was meant to educate Nigerians and the world at large about the Nigerian civil war that gave him the glory as the last commander of 3MCDO and the Nigerian officer whose troops not only ended the civil war but also received the surrender instrument from Biafra. Undoubtedly, his efforts at commanding the 3MCDO Division of the Nigerian Army from May 16th, 1969 to January 1970 when the war ended, is an important part of the history of our nation. 3MCDO was divided into four sectors by Col. Adekunle before Obasanjo took over the command, and Sector 1 had been very problematic after losing Owerri to Biafra. This was at a time it seemed situations were getting out of control for Sector 1 of 3MCDO of the Nigerian Army under the Command of Godwin Ally, right at Port Harcourt before the very eyes of Obasanjo, the new divisional commander.

When he arrived at the Port Harcourt war front in May 1969, he came along with Col. (Catholic priest) Pedro Martins, which was appropriate as that sector of 3MCDO at that juncture needed prayers and God's speed. Col. Adekunle, the erstwhile commander, was himself, spinning out of control, and needed a rest, while the 3MCDO as a fighting unit needed a new commander. Adekunle had served, and was tired, but he did not realise he was fatigued. Adekunle loved his 3 MCDO. He worked hard all day long and was busy going on attack, carrying dead or dying soldiers. I was his chief of staff. He led from the front, and was there at every stage of the operation except when he had to travel out of the war front. He already had what was called PTSS (Post Trauma Stress Syndrome). I guess that is the reason why presidents, governors, leaders and elders never went

on leave in Nigeria until forced to do so by illness. Even then, they kept calling the office, giving instructions and also getting annoyed on trivialities. Maybe they thought only they had the preserve of knowledge of governance or public administration. But before the change of command, Adekunle reorganised the 3MCDO into four sectors and posted his key officers to the newly created and difficult sectors. Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo was posted to Sector 4 at Calabar, Alabi-Isama was posted to Sector 3 at Uyo and Ikot Ekpene, Akinrinade was posted to Sector 2 at Aba, while Lt. Col. Godwin Ally, the new arrival to 3MCDO was posted to Sector 1 whose 14 Brigade commanded by Maj. George Innih had just withdrawn from Owerri area, some 80 kilometres away from his forward units.

image

image

Sector 1 operation area was very hotly contested with Biafran troops, which had also just recaptured Owerri from 16 Brigade of 3MCDO commanded by Lt. Col. Utuk, and were heading south to Port Harcourt. All other fronts of the 3MCDO were completely stable except Owerri front in Sector 1 area of operation. Col. Obasanjo decided to undergo his first baptism in the war front by ordering a counter-attack on Ohoba, a town about 40 kilometres away from Sector 1 forward troops, where Sector 1 troops had just withdrawn from. Lt. Col. Godwin Ally was the sector commander and Col. Obasanjo the new commander; both had their opportunity there and then, to demonstrate the stuff that they were made of. It was their first operation in 3MCDO sector of the war. Despite all warnings against an unplanned attack, and against all known principles of war, they attacked Ohoba without knowing enough of Biafran troops'

positions and dispositions. This commander was definitely not Adegunle.

The attack was not properly planned, and it was like a World War I or II conventional battle plan. But he did not have the troops superiority ratio to attack Biafran positions at Ohoba. He needed to have painstakingly checked whatever information was available about Biafran positions, the gaps available to manoeuvre through, the intelligence reports on their reserves, and most importantly, the number of Biafran troops that he would be facing in the attack. All these were not done since this was his first combat experience.

Obasanjo never commanded a battalion not even a brigade before he was saddled with 3 Marine Commando Division of the Nigerian Army on the battlefield. Even Godwin Ally who had battle experience in 2 Division did not help his boss. I guess that because people like him back in Lagos had heard how easy it had been for the 3MCDO to capture towns and places, he probably also thought it was achieved without a plan. Therefore, since what had to be done was not done to achieve success, it ended in disaster. Sector 1 troops of 3MCDO withdrew once again from Ohoba with over 1,000 troops counted dead and many more wounded within an hour of battle. Biafran troops gave it all they had and once again proved that they were no pushovers and that the war was not over yet. The hospitals were full of casualties. These facts are contained in Col. Olusegun Obasanjo's book titled, *My Command* Page 97. To make matters worse, Obasanjo and Ally were not in the attack like Adegunle used to do with us and also taught his officers to do as well. They just ordered the men to carry on.

What I have set out to explain in this book, is that some of the stories in Obasanjo's book *My Command* need to be re-addressed, and as they are not totally true, must be corrected for posterity. Since his book discusses several

other subjects outside the military, beyond my direct personal knowledge, I will only concern myself with the military tactics and strategy aspects of the book. This whole book would have been difficult to write had my mother not kept all the pictures, my uniforms, shoes, jackets, my red berets, and the popular commando cane. I thought I had burnt these things before I left for other countries and at the time of my mother's death in 1984. I finally discovered them in 2010 when I went to renovate her house in Ilorin in preparation for my 70th birthday celebrations. I did not want to be reminded of military days where I had spent the best part of my youth but which some people deliberately have made nonsense of for reasons best known to them. I also thought that I did not have what it took to write a book. I never thought of writing any book.

The pictures were over 40 years old and when Akinrinade finally brought the book, *My Command*, I wept. I truly missed my mother. Every map, notes and pictures reminded me of the operations and the situations.

On page 79 of the book, *My Command*, Obasanjo wrote the following lines about me:

Page 79, para. 3.

The following day 6 June, I visited 3 Sector under command of Lt Col Alabi Isama with its headquarters in Uyo. The Sector covered the area from Azumini to Cross River. The sector commander, a flamboyant character, was by any standards a very intelligent man and would have been one of the best officers the Nigerian Army had ever produced if he had applied his intelligence and ability fully to productive and positive action in the Army.

This is like writing my confidential report. Well, I joined the military from high school. I spent all my time, money and

life reading military history books on weapons, tactics, and strategy. I have never had a political ambition and was always my mother's child. I had no other skill until I left the military and I know nothing else but military. I, therefore, set out here to respond appropriately and accordingly for posterity. The book, *The Tragedy of Victory by Alabi-Isama*, I am sure, must have shown some of my activities in peace and war times of my military career, and the rest is left for posterity to judge.

I will also show that the strategy used to end the war was not original to him (Obasanjo) although he tried to discredit me, the original planner — Lt. Col. Alabi-Isama. These facts will be supported with appropriate figures, documents, maps, and relevant pictures.

Whatever the plan, and whoever made it did not matter since all of us worked with the commander but he thought that we were all working for him. But for the commander to discredit Alabi-Isama the planner, personally, just to take credit for what he did not know anything about or ever thought about was wrong, irreligious, and ungodly. Here is what an officer major later Major General M.C Ali, a former chief of army staff wrote about me in his book, "The Federal Republic of Nigerian Army". He was my deputy in 1976/77 when I was the PGSO (Principal General Staff Officer of the Nigerian Army.

I left the command of 134 Infantry Battalion, Major Isaac Adaka Boro's fighting unit during the war, in 1975 on posting to Army Headquarters in Lagos as a General Staff Officer Grade 2 in charge of Operations and Training for the Army. It was a posting that opened up to me, wide and far-reaching configurations in the profession, its politics and its involvement in, and my understanding of the military in politics. Then located along the famous and fashionable

Marina, Lagos, adjacent to Glover's Memorial Hall it was an edifying elegant structure of five floors housing also, the Navy Air Force Headquarters and the Ministry of Defence. It was a cluster of offices and conference rooms with the clattering of typewriters and the humming of ageing air conditioners, tired from over-use and electric outages. This was the nerve centre and brain box, the command, control and communication fort from which the services got their marching, sailing and flying orders. In retrospect, there is no doubt that it was a very efficient hub of activity.

Brigadier General Gordon Alabi-Isama was the Principal General Staff Officer in charge of the General Staff Branches otherwise abbreviated PGSO. It was the branch that made the Army tick. It was responsible for training and operations throughout the Army. All other Branches took a cue from its strategic plans. On the staff we had also, Lieutenant Colonel Dahiru Mohammed, an upcoming bright star who died in a fatal automobile accident along the old Kaduna-Zaria highway in 1976. There was also the voluble, forthright Major Yohana Madaki, who seemed to fire all the time, from the hip, fearlessly. Then, the computer-like duo of Majors MEU Akhan and Felix Oguribido, Infantry and Education Corps officers respectively. The PGSO, Brigadier Gordon Alabi-Isama, worked us to our bare bones, but we all enjoyed it. Two senior officers influenced my perceptions of military life and my attitudes to it. Colonel Paul Tarfa was commander II Infantry Brigade in 1971, an offshoot of the elite Brigade of Guards commanded by the ebullient, versatile and sagacious Brigadier Joseph Nanven Garba. Colonel Tarfa led one of the most efficient and regimental brigades under the command of fatherly Brigadier James J. Oluleye who was General Officer Commanding the 2 Infantry Division between 1971-74.

Brigadier Gordon Alabi-Isama was a different kettle of fish: an accomplished sportsman, an achiever and a man of action. He was brilliant to a fault and seemed to flaunt it. He was extremely hardworking and equally hard living. He hardly drank but would provide for your excesses in this area. He insisted on perfection like a faith and would rave, actor-like, when standards are below mark, though he would painstakingly and quickly guide subordinates. He was eloquent and read profusely a habit I copied very well but could never match. His ability to devour the written word was inspiring. Great men, particularly eminent soldiers, were often our subject of discussion and he was enthused with the life and ordeals of General George Scott Patton, a quintessential warrior who commanded the American 3 Army in the Second World War. He would say 'keep your men on their toes, not on their rumps, and you get no hassles.'

Here is how the same officer described General Olusegun Obasanjo:

General Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo. He is an able soldier statesman, intellectually capable and one of the proponents of purposeful leadership. He received Biafran surrender by divine opportunity and went on, in years, as head of state, to be one single African leader to demonstrate that national interest could override personal ego and aggrandizement by willingly conducting a return to democracy and handing political power to a civil government. An eminent global personage and a fitting window on Nigeria. Luck and opportunity have been, arguably his greatest divine asset.

Obasanjo's statements in *My Command* are in smaller type size, while my responses are in bolder type for ease of reference. This is the duty I owe history and posterity.

image

Chapter III of *My Command*

The Turning Point

My Command Page 26, para. 1.

Throughout the crisis in 1966, I remained at my station in Kaduna until I was posted to Lagos in January 1967 to assume the duty of the Chief Army Engineer, a post that Lt. Col. Okwechime had to abandon in July 1966.

Comment

This statement is a fact. Col. Olusegun Obasanjo was Chief Army Engineer of the Nigerian Army from July 1966 at the exodus of Ibo-speaking members of the Nigerian Army to their homes in the Eastern Region at the height of the unrest in the northern part of the country.

My Command Page 28, para. 3 (Last sentence)

At that point, the political attitude in the West to the war was one of aloofness.

Comment

This statement is correct and until the Biafrans entered the Midwest Region on night of August 8th 1967 and got to the Western Region border at Ore, the Western Region's attitude to the war was one of aloofness.

My Command Page 34, para. 1

I ordered the Shasha Bridge at Milestone 82 on the Ore-Ijebu Ode road and another one on the old Ondo-Ore

road to be demolished. The Oluwa Bridge on the Ore-Okitipupa Road was under construction, and that road was impassable. A Western State Ministry of Works team, under Mr. J. Akande, an executive engineer in the Ministry helped with these vital demolitions on the night of 20/ 21 August 1967.

Comment

Col. Obasanjo was the Commander of the Nigerian Army Engineers. He was also based at Ibadan as the Commander, Ibadan Garrison Organisation, when Agbekoya rioters got to about 500 metres of the Government House, after freeing prisoners at Agodi prisons in Ibadan. At the time also, the Biafran troops had reached Ore, the border of the Western Region with the Midwest, after they invaded and overran the Midwest. The situation in the region was tense, complicated by Col. Banjo's back channel activities to co-opt the leadership of the West. Col. Obasanjo, the military commander and the troops there were so confused that they just looked on and did nothing until he was advised by the wife of the then Military Governor of Western Region, Chief (Mrs.) Modupe Adebayo, to do something about the desperate situation by moving troops there quickly. This was how Major General Adeyinka Adebayo described what happened in his biography.

The situation became very desperate and threatening. Unfortunately this very day Governor Adebayo, as the Chief Security Officer, was on a working visit to Iseyin. Security officers were drifting, not knowing what to do. At this point, Chief (Mrs.) Adebayo seized the initiative. She told the General Officer Commanding (GOC), Col. Olusegun Obasanjo, of the military formation stationed in Ibadan, that he needed to act swiftly an advice which Col.

Obasanjo took. The soldiers were promptly deployed and, shortly after, law and order was restored.

(Please see pages 63 and 64 of the book, *Onward Soldier Marches On: A Biography of Major General Adeyinka Adebayo.*)



I invited Lt. Col. Akinrinade (left,) to my Uyo HQ to discuss Op. Pincer, my new plan to end the war.

In other words, Col Obasanjo's account of this event in his book *My Command* is not correct. Mr. Akande of the PWD (Public Works Department) of the Ministry of Works blew those bridges on the orders of the Governor's Office as the Governor, Brigadier-General Adeyinka Adebayo was himself out of station at the time of Agbekoya riots in the Western Region. Mr. C.S. Akande did not obtain any instructions from Col. Obasanjo to act.

Col. Obasanjo did not order Mr. Akande or his ministry or anybody for that matter in the army to blow the bridges. It will be recalled that on the night of August 8th, 1967, I was attacked alone by about 10 to 20 Biafran troops at the Catering Rest House where I lived in Asaba, and after defeating them, my signal message and the police report I made at Agbor to 4th Area Command HQ at Benin City and AHQ Lagos were to inform them of Biafra's intentions to enter Lagos by 5-6.00a.m. I wrote in these reports that I could delay them by attacking and running since it was at night, until about 5-6.00a.m. before entry into Benin City to avoid their entering Lagos by early morning as planned. The time was about 11.00p.m. of August 8th, 1967. I kept my promise. However, in order to further delay the Biafran troops, I advised AHQ to order the blowing-up of these bridges. Naturally, the AHQ in Lagos would have ordered the military garrison at Ibadan commanded by Obasanjo to blow the said bridges, but he complained that he had no resources to do so and left it at that. However, he did not contact the Regional Ministry of Works on the subject, or make any other effort, but Chief (Mrs.) Modupe Adebayo did and result was achieved.

Chapter IV of *My Command* The Midwest Operation

***My Command* Page 41, para. 3.**

Tactics had to be changed to meet the military and non-military hostilities during operations in Ibo-speaking areas.

Comments

This is correct. This was the only lesson Col. Adekunle ignored after the capture of Port Harcourt by the troops of 3MCDO before he ordered the attack on Ibo heartland of Aba, Oguta, and Owerri. Adekunle paid dearly for this lapse in judgement. This was the point made to Obasanjo by Akinrinade and I in early 1969 when we went to his house at Ibadan to brief him on the goings-on in 3MCDO with Adekunle. Akinrinade had suggested his name to succeed Adekunle as the new commander of 3MCDO. I did not know him (Obasanjo) well enough to do that. We had since regretted that.

Chapter V of *My Command*: The Southern Sector

***My Command* Page 49, para. 2**

At the end of January, 1968 orders were issued for the crossing into Uyo Province. The plan was to use the whole of 3 Marine Commando Division for the operation. The thrust would be made in the Direction of Ikot Ekpene and Port-Harcourt. Maj. Aliyu took over command of 12 Brigade and had instructions to neutralize the Obubra area by advancing from Oban through Ekang to Ugep and linking up with 13 Brigade. The Obubra campaign took six weeks with feeble and faint-hearted rebel opposition but the terrain posed enormous problems of administration. 12 and 13 Brigades converged on Obubra in March 1968 capturing assorted equipment including termite killer which Federal soldiers almost mistook for beer.

Comments

These three points are not correct. Advance to Obubra was a separate operation from advance to Port Harcourt and both are miles apart. Obubra is about 300 kilometres north of Calabar, while Port Harcourt is another 480 kilometres southwest of Calabar. He ought to have studied the map and contacted troops that operated in that sector while doing his research for the book, because he was not there to know, and should have asked from those who knew before writing this fiction. Obubra to Calabar, took about two days by road in a good jeep. Obubra to Port Harcourt is about 800 kilometres and a few days' journey by road. Therefore, both were not the same operation and direction. I Alabi-Isama

planned and commanded the entire operation from Calabar to Obubra in February 1968, and also planned and commanded 3MCDO troops from Calabar to Port Harcourt from April to May 1968 as approved by 3MCDO Commander, Col Benjamin Adekunle. On this advance, the route was from Calabar to Obubra. We advanced through Calabar to Odukpani, Ikot-Okpura-Iwuru, cutting through the jungle and infiltrating in tens and maximum of twenty. We were unable to carry heavy weapons other than machine guns, self-propelled grenades, 81mm mortars, and two-inch mortars. Anything else would have been too heavy and cumbersome which would have been counter-productive. We also crossed River Udep by building a bridge on it, to facilitate logistics. I know, because I led both attacks in February, 1968.

image

We then advanced to Adim with Akunakuna to the left. We infiltrated through the Uwet valleys and Oban hills to rendezvous at Adim. 12 Brigade was commanded by Major Aliyu, 13 Brigade by Major Tuoyo and a third unit of enlarged 8 Battalion which was styled a brigade was commanded by Major Utuk. The aim was to cut off Biafran troops at Ogoja and entire Biafran defences from Mbebu to Oban-Ekang and Ikom. If we took the route as outlined in Col. Obasanjo's book, *My Command*, that route would have been very difficult and we would probably have failed as we would have had casualties fighting Biafran troops that were dug-in and waiting in defensive positions at Oban and Ekang. We would have had to cross a very big river called the Cross River, at Nssakpa. If that was done, we would have had two more big rivers to cross to capture Obubra. The route through which we infiltrated had only small brooks and we waded through them. These movements were based on facts from intelligence reports from our 3MCDO lady

scouts and patrol reports of those sent to the area from January to February 1968. Their rendezvous with the main body advancing from Calabar was at Iwuru. Map 7 on page 93 of *My Command* by Col. Obasanjo, as regards 3MCDO operations in Obubra sector is not correct. The aim of this operation *was firstly* to clear the right side of the South-eastern State of Biafran troops to enable the new government of the state to be established. More importantly was to have a land route for our supplies which were hitherto difficult by sea, including the evacuation of our casualties by road and to close the land route Ikom-Cameroon international border to Biafra permanently. We had a clear AIM.

Secondly, the Port Harcourt advance was from Calabar through Oron- Eket to Opobo to the left with the enveloping troops from Calabar through Creek town and infiltrating through Ikot Nya to Affia Isong and into ITU. We crossed ITU River in a difficult river-crossing operation to ambush Biafran troops at Uyo and at Ikpe Junction. From there, we were to link up with the main body through Abak and Etinan at Opobo as part of 3MCDO Phase 1 advance to Port Harcourt. I planned and led these troops into Port Harcourt with the approval of Col. Adekunle who was busy in Lagos getting supplies. If Col. Obasanjo was writing about the 30-day 3MCDO advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt - 17th April to 18th May 1968, Map 7 on page 93 of his book, he is not correct.

image

image

The correct 3MCDO plan of advance to Port Harcourt is shown and discussed earlier in part 2 of this book and the map is repeated here for ease of reference.



That was how Col Adekunle himself got the name 'Black Scorpion'. *Thirdly*, the issue of 3MCDO mistaking termite killer for beer is fictitious. *Fourthly*, more than 50% of 3MCDO troops could read and write as most of them on that advance to Obubra were the newly recruited troops from Calabar area who were undergoing their first baptism of war. *Fifthly*, I was there personally as the commander of the expedition, and such a report never got to me from any of the forward commanders.

Lastly, Col. Obasanjo never visited Ugep or Obubra when he was the commander of 3MCDO Division, at least not when I was there and above all, at the time the book was written and first published in 1980, only Major Aliyu had died; all the other commanders including Major Utuk were still alive. I think that Obasanjo must have read the story of Nigerian troops in Burma back in 1945, during World War II when Nigerian troops mistook blood plasma for marmalade and ate it with their bread. In 1945 majority of the Nigerian troops who went to Burma and who were stationed in Rangoon, were illiterates, never spoke English, let alone being able to read English.

My Command Page 48, para. 3.

It was decided in the face of the very serious threat to Bonny that Bonny should be created an independent command directly responsible to Lagos as opposed to remaining under command of 3 Marine Commando Division. By this time the detachment in Bonny had suffered heavy casualties and the last detachment commander Bello, had been seriously wounded and evacuated to Lagos.

Comments

There are two points here that need to be put right. *Firstly*, the word Lagos here by Gen. Obasanjo meant AHQ; and Bonny was to come under the Command of then Col. Oluleye the GSO 1 at AHQ. Akinrinade had just been posted to take over the Command of 15 Brigade on Bonny Island. When Akinrinade was in trouble at Bonny, he contacted Col. Oluleye who sent barbed wire - which was alright for World War I, not even correct for World War II of 1945; let alone in 1968.

Secondly, the coordinates that Col. Oluleye gave the NAF for bombing the Biafran troops on Bonny Island were wrong. Not only did the bombs land wrongly, they landed on the only bread bakery feeding our troops on the Island and destroyed it. *Thirdly*, when Lt. Sani Bello was wounded in Bonny, I (Alabi-Isama) evacuated him by helicopter to Calabar, and not to Lagos. He went to Lagos eventually, but he was not evacuated from Bonny to Lagos as written in Obasanjo's book.

Later, however, AHQ did send a company of reinforcements by ship from the federal guard to Bonny.

My Command Pages 50, para. 1.

The Itu crossing by canoes was abandoned and a fording operation was successfully carried out a few kilometers Lower down the river with Air Forces support. The Oron and Itu forces linked up at Uyo cutting off substantial quantities of rebel supplies and troops who later surrendered. Ikot Ekpene became so threatened that rebel forces almost completely abandoned it, running into the bush in civilian dress.

image

image

Page 50, para. 2

From Oron, 16 and 17 Brigades with some new units had gradually converged on Eket. Here Isaac Boro and his Rivers men of 'Sea School Boys' had become a Significant factor in the operations of the Division. Their knowledge of the riverine areas, their understanding of local languages, their ability to live off the land and their swift though tactically less accomplished movement accounted for their huge success in areas around Opobo, Andoni, Obodo, Opolom, Oranga, Buguma, etc. 16 and 17 Brigades continued to move steadily until they entered Opobo. While forces were being assembled in Opobo for the Port Harcourt operation. 15 Brigade still based in Bonny launched an amphibious attack on Port Harcourt without adequate punch. The offensive failed. Meanwhile the Divisional Commander decided to take on Afikpo with 12 Brigade. 31 and 34 Battalions of the Brigade converged on Afikpo. Maj. Ahmadu Aliyu himself, the Brigade Commander, led the link - up of the two battalions and held the town until it was handed over to 26 Battalion of 1 Division.

The stories in these two passages had been seriously distorted and the facts jumbled. 13 and 14 Brigades of 3 MCDO did not fail at Itu. These were the enveloping and ambush troops. 13 Brigade was commanded by Major Sunny Tuoyo while 14 Brigade was commanded by Eromobor. There was a third brigade, which was the 12 Brigade Special Forces, commanded by Major Aliyu. Oron and Itu forces did not link up at Uyo, but at Opobo on D+10=April 27th 1968. Uyo to Opobo is about 150 kilometres. We used 500 swimmers and dugout canoes to cross Itu River. There was no fording. We did not use the air force because we infiltrated into our ambush locations. When Biafran troops ordered to reinforce Oron from Umuahia drove past Ikot Ekpene, the air force flew past without bombing or strafing because we needed to capture their vehicles intact to

facilitate our rapid advance to Port Harcourt. This was air force infantry/ co-ordination and co-operation. We had no vehicles. The Biafran troops, seeing the jet fighters jumped out of their vehicles, as we thought they would. We left a gap opened at Azumini to let them slip away. Remember that the AIM of the entire war was to keep Nigeria ONE. Both the ambush and the capture of their vehicles were successful. Isaac Boro was 19 Brigade commander. The town of Buguma is after Port Harcourt, and not close to Opobo. 15 Brigade was commanded by Akinrinade, and there was no amphibious attack on Port Harcourt from Bonny. Details have been discussed in parts 1 and 2 of this book. Obasanjo was not anywhere near these operations, so he could not have known the correct situation, and since he thought he knew it all, he did not ask. This part of his book, is not correct, as I, Alabi-Isama commanded the entire operation from Calabar to Port Harcourt from April to May 1968.

i Oron landing was led by Lt. Cols. Ayo Ariyo and Shande and they had no setbacks at all during and after the landing. Oron and ITU were two different operations and Oron is about 100 kilometres away from Itu. 12, 13 and 14 Brigades went to Itu, while 16, 17 and 19 Brigades landed at Oron axis.

ii. There was no naval or air force pounding at James Town. The operation at James Town was by quiet infiltration. The air force and naval bombardments were at Oron to give covering fire to support Ayo Ariyo's 16 Brigade and Shande's 17 Brigade landings. No landing was diverted at Oron to Allen Saw Mills. Akinrinade came from Bonny to assist in the command and control of the first wave of troops that landed at Parrot Island and then to Oron main beaches. James Town operation was by 19 Brigade of Isaac Boro.

Itu crossing was never abandoned, and there was no fording operation at Itu. There was no air force operation or bombing or support at Itu, because it was an infiltration exercise to get to the ambush positions. Oron and Itu forces did not link up at Uyo. When the envelopment and the ambush operations were completed at Itu, Uyo and Ikot Ekpene the link up was at Opobo on D+10=27th April, 1968.1 led the advance and the attack.

iv. 16 and 17 Brigades did not converge on Eket. 16 Brigade commanded by Ayo Ariyo went to Opobo, 17 Brigade which was commanded by Shande went to Ekeffe on Opobo Paver crossing points, to Akwette, Afam power station and to their blocking position at Obigbo. 17 Brigade never entered Opobo.

v. Isaac Boro died at Okrika before we got to Port Harcourt and did not get to Buguma which is a town after Port Harcourt. I wish he did. Buguma is after Port Harcourt, and before Degema. Obasanjo did not know about those operations.

vi. 15 Brigade Commanded by Lt. Col. Akinrinade never launched an amphibious attack on Port Harcourt and, therefore, did not have a failed operation at Port Harcourt. AHQ thought it was as a result of a Biafran ambush at Dawse Island and that the Bonny river channel was mined and littered with obstacle logs. But Akinrinade's problem at Onne was primarily because Isaac Boro lost 48 hours during the Abana attack, while Col. Adekunle from his Operational RS301 radio in Lagos was insisting that Akinrinade must attack Onne as scheduled. Both 15 Brigade and Isaac Boro's 19 Brigade later came under the command of Major Yemi Alabi after Isaac Boro's death at Okrika. 15 Brigade was a diversionary force and was never to attack Port Harcourt and they never did. Details of these moves are in parts 1 and 2

of the book under Port Harcourt advance and with supporting operational maps and pictures.

vii. Afikpo operation was part of Obubra operation in February 1968, so it had nothing to do with Port Harcourt advance of April 17th, 1968. Afikpo is almost 800 kilometres away, east of Port Harcourt. Afikpo was an opportunity target. I ordered the capture of Afikpo with a view to linking up with 1 Division to have a direct road exit from 3MCDO area of operations to ease our inability to evacuate casualties and to enable us to receive supplies by road passing through 1 Division operation area. However, due to the urgency of 3MCDO Port Harcourt operation, I was ordered by Col. Adekunle to return to Calabar and hand over Afikpo in particular, which had been captured by 12 Brigade led by Major Aliyu, to troops of 1 Division. I attacked Afikpo with 12 Brigade commanded by Major Aliyu because I also wanted to have the feel of attacking Ibo heartland. It was very successful indeed. Adekunle ordered us to return to Calabar immediately and to hand over Afikpo to troops of 1 Division. We achieved our AIM in all respects.

viii. There was no delay whatsoever in the Port Harcourt operation. The operation for the 30-day 480 kilometres advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt was planned and led by me with Isaac Boro, Ayo Ariyo, Shande, Eromobor, Abubakar, Aliyu, Tuoyo and Akinrinade in support. We were very successful indeed and had not even a second's delay as the navy, air force and infantry coordination and cooperation were timed to the last second. It was also tied to the envelopment and the ambush operations to the north at Itu, Uyo and Ikot Ekpene. The unplanned landing at Parrot Island became an advantage when it fell in line with the air force bombing plan. This operation was a minuscule of 'Operation Husky' by US General George Patton and his 7th Army Group during WW II in 1943 at his amphibious

landings at three points in Sicily — Licata, Gela and Scoglitti while also laying an ambush north of Gela at Ponte Olive. So was 3MCDO's amphibious landing at Oron, James Town, and Okopedi, while also laying ambush to the north of Oron at Uyo.

image

ix. The forced march from Calabar to Port Harcourt was on five fronts, not three. The advance alleged by Obasanjo, i.e. Obette, along Imo River, Bori, Elelenwa and in the West from Ika waterside and Bodo West is fiction. The five fronts *were: first*, Akinrinade from Bonny on the Atlantic coast, *second*, Isaac Boro from James Town on Cross River; *third*, Ayo Ariyo landing at Oron on Cross River, *Fourth*, was Shande landing at Okopedi to the right of Ayo Ariyo from Oron across the Cross River from Calabar to the mainland while the *fifth* front was, the enveloping and the ambush team from the north at ITU, Uyo and Ikot Ekpene led by Alabi-Isama. All 3MCDO forces converged, at Opobo for the river crossing operation of Opobo River to Bori, Aletu, Elelenwa into Port Harcourt on D+10=27th April 1968. These movements were well choreographed and the command and control were perfect. I, Alabi-Isama planned and commanded these particular operations. **Map on page 505 is relevant.**

x. Yes, Isaac Boro died at Okrika but not because he went on a private visit. He had just received his battle orders from me for the final push into Port Harcourt. It was on his way back from my HQ at Aletu Eleme, at 6.00a.m., to his HQ at Okrika that he was shot by a Biafran straggler. His brigade was taken over immediately for the final battle into Port Harcourt by Maj. Yemi Alabi. The brigade was not uncontrollable. Col. Adekunle taught us to build a team, not individual champions. Isaac Boro's death did not demoralise his troops; rather they got annoyed and advanced six hours

earlier than planned. When I noticed their annoyance and how they rained their bullets on Biafran troops, his 19 and 15 Brigades were put on reserve at Okrika throughout our entry into Port Harcourt on May 18th, 1968.

The two brigades (15 and 19) were put on reserve under Yemi Alabi for the capture of Port Harcourt and later passed through Port Harcourt to Elele and Igrita to capture Ahoada. The troops previously under Isaac Boro finally returned to Port Harcourt to serve with Akinrinade in the special forces that cleared all riverine areas of Biafran troops where they were best suited to operate and thereafter destroyed the Biafran Navy. They remained at Abonema, Degema, Buguma and Ahoada after Port Harcourt had been captured, until the end of the war.

My Command Page 51, para. 3.

Spoils of war from looting had not been lacking for the troops either.

xi. This is a very unfortunate statement in Obasanjo's book. Apart from Col. Adekunle's address to the troops before we left Calabar, we never attacked any town en route Port Harcourt. We always captured them by bypassing them through the difficult creeks and mangrove forests. I should know if there was any looting because I was in charge. I led 3MCDO troops into Port Harcourt. Obasanjo was not there! Therefore, at what stage did the looting start? Was it when he took over command or before?

image

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There was no incentive for 3MCDO troops to loot. The terrain and our tactics simply did not encourage it and Adekunle discouraged his men from it for their own safety.

image

My Command Pages 51, Para. 3. (Last sentence)

Col. Adekunle, at this juncture, saw the war not only in terms of crushing a rebellion, but also as a means of building himself up for any future political position or responsibility which he might wish to seek. I knew of people of Western State origin who had felt politically victimized and who saw in Col. Adekunle a savior and told him so, and he believed them. Col. Adekunle's next plan therefore was a grand one which he nicknamed operation OAU - the simultaneous capture of Owerri, Aba and Umuahia.

My Command Pages 52, Para. 2.

With the capture of Port Harcourt, the next task was the riverine operation to secure the outlying areas around it. The riverine operation was carried out by 15 Brigade with the support of troops of the disbanded 19 Brigade. On completion of that operation the Division was reorganized into sectors before launching

Contd. on page 53.

operation OAU. 15 Brigade, now under the command of Maj. Yemi Alabi, and 16 Brigade, Command by Maj. Utuk, were charged with responsibility for the capture of Owerri. 12 Brigade under Capt. Isemade and 17 Brigade under Maj.

Shande were assigned the task of capturing Aba. 13 Brigade commanded by Maj. Tuoyo and 18 Brigade commanded by Maj. Aliyu were given the task of capturing Umuahia. 14 Brigade commanded by Maj. George Innih was to provide the link between Owerri and Aba. The advance to Aba led to 105 Battalion of 17 Brigade and the advance to Owerri led by 33 Battalion of 16 Brigade proceeded almost simultaneously. The going was rough but the advance of the Division along a fairly wide front, from River Niger to the Cross River, stretched the rebel's resources quite as much as it stretched the resources of 3 Marine Commando Division. But also, more importantly the initiative was on the side of the advancing Federal troops. Meanwhile, the command of 15 Brigade had passed to Maj. Makanjuola who made a bold dash to Oguta by the river and landed on the northern side of the lake on 10 September 1968 threatening Uli-Ihiala airstrip and causing panic within the rebel camp. Oguta could not be secured and Federal troops had to withdraw from there on 15 September 1968 to avoid being encircled. A day later, on 16 September 1968, 16 Brigade entered and captured Owerri which partly served as the administrative headquarters of Biafra. 17 Brigade endeavored to maintain the link between Owerri and Aba but it was vigorously opposed by the mercenary Steiner and his rebel commands. The progress being made within Owerri and Aba sectors of the Division's operation was more than encouraging, and it appeared to the Federal side that 1968 would see the end of the civil war.

After the capture of Aba and Owerri, the Division was reorganized into the following sectors:

Sector commanded by Col. Godwin Ally comprising 15 Brigade and 16 Brigade. Sector commanded by Lt. Col. Akinrinade, comprising 14 and 17 Brigades.

Sector commanded by Lt. Col. Alabi Isama, comprising 12 Brigade. 13 Brigade and 18 Brigade.

Sector based in Calabar for administrative purposes mainly commanded by Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo.

But progress in 3 sectors, Umuahia, was negative, which gave concern to the Division Commander. Capture of Umuahia by 3 Division was no longer possible. 2 Division in Onitsha was not making any headway although 1 Division was making some steady progress towards Umuahia after the capture of Okigwe.

Comments

i. Adekunle's alleged political ambition was not made known to any of his officers and I was the closest. Adekunle never made any political statements or sought cheap popularity by announcing stupidly that full salary would be paid to fighting troops in the war front and that the rest they never got would now happen by establishing rest areas at Port Harcourt. It was Obasanjo that made political statements in the war front.

ii. Adekunle's downfall was his grand plan to capture OAU (Owerri, Aba and Umuahia) without a plan and without an aim. He underrated Biafran troops ability to continue to fight after the capture of Port Harcourt. To make matters worse, he deployed troops that had been involved in the 30-day sleepless and restless forced march from Calabar to Port Harcourt. I pushed the troops so hard, that many had blisters on their feet and some hated me for that. Adekunle later learnt the hard way that after such gruelling work, troops needed physical and mental rest and recuperation (R and R). We were all taught, even as boy scouts, to make haste slowly.

iii. Only 17 Brigade commanded by Lt. Col. Shande was involved in the attack and initial capture of Aba. 12 Brigade commanded by Isemmede was not. Shande was called a "Coward" by Adekunle and it was in anger that he went on the attack after complaining that his troops were not ready. He died in Aba during that attack. Thereafter, Akinrinade was posted to recapture Aba which he did on Wednesday September 4th, 1968. When a place or situation became difficult, it was either Akinrinade or Alabi-Isama who would usually be ordered to the rescue. Aba was recaptured by Akinrinade.

image

(iv) 13 Brigade was commanded by Major Tuoyo but 18 Brigade was not commanded by Major Aliyu; Lt Col Obeya was the Commander of 18 Brigade, and he was based at Itu as part of 3 Sector. These two brigades (13 and 18) never attacked Umuahia at anytime. 3MCDO never attacked Umuahia. The nearest that 13 Brigade of 3MCDO got to Umuahia was their frontline at Obot Akara where Biafran troops blew the bridge on the tributary of Kwa Iboe River about 40 kilometres south of Umuahia on Umuahia-Ikot Ekpene road.

My Command Pages 54, para. 1 (last sentence) and page 55, para.1

On 25th April 1969 during the night the Brigade withdrew from Owerri by a disused road unsuspected by the rebels. It was a clean break and a tactical withdrawal which could have led to a rout had it not been for the forbearance, discipline and experience of the officers and men concerned. They carried along with them in their withdrawal, the corpse of their second-in-command, Maj. Hamman, who had died earlier during the siege. The siege,

the withdrawal and the loss sustained there from destroyed what remained of the myth of invincibility within the Division, deepened the despondency and brought the morale of troops of 3 Marine Commando Division to its lowest ebb. The rebels' morale on the other hand was rising. A drastic change was needed to arrest the dangerous military development which could lead to military and political disaster.

Comments

In July 1968, immediately after Adekunle announced his OAU plan to the press, we reported what may happen thereafter to AHQ in Lagos and Adekunle was warned accordingly. The Chief of Army Staff Gen. Hassan Katsina visited 3MCDO. I received his team, and Adekunle was said to be busy in Lagos gathering supplies. Col. Obasanjo accompanied Gen. Hassan Katsina on the trip. Shortly after, Gen. Gowon the head of state also visited to appraise the situation for himself. The situation was still not clear until it showed itself on the ground when Aba was counter-attacked, Oguta captured and lost and finally when Owerri was attacked, captured and lost. The adverse situation of 3MCDO did not start in April 1969, but in July 1968 when OAU was announced to the press in Lagos.

When we (Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama) went to Lagos in May 1969 to brief the Head of State and the AHQ on what we had warned against in July 1968, we were directed to discuss with Col. Obasanjo at Ibadan which we did. Obasanjo knew what was happening. But rather than advise Adekunle, he also joined in chastising him. The point was that Adekunle was tired and with PTSS, (Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome) thinking rationally was difficult. If Utuk could get out of his siege at Owerri at will, why could we not go to him to relieve him of pressure? The problem was

Sector 1 of 3MCDO, not the entire division stretching from Obubra to Port Harcourt.

image

Chapter VI of *My Command*

Change of Command

***My Command* Pages 56, para. 3.**

The federal finger-tip hold on Aba was considerably weakened. The morale of the soldiers at least of 3 Marine Commando Division was at its lowest ebb. Desertion and absence from duty without leave was rife in the Division. The despondence and general will to fight in the soldiers was glaringly manifest in the large number of cases of self-inflicted injuries throughout the formation.

Comment

a. Here, Obasanjo was working to the answer. *Firstly*, Akinrinade had more than a finger-tip hold on Aba. Please refer to the capture of Aba in part 2 of this book.

b. *Secondly*, to say that the morale and the fighting spirit of the FORMATION, which meant the entire 3MCDO Division, was at its lowest ebb was a great exaggeration. Only Sector 1 had these problems and desertion started when Col. Obasanjo arrived at 3MCDO as new commander on May 16th, 1969 and ordered the attack of Ohoba on 20th and 21st May, 1969 without a PLAN and without an AIM. To make matters worse, he ordered, tired and recuperating 16 Brigade troops that were beleaguered for seven months inside Owerri to join in, barely 20 days after breaking out of the siege. Obasanjo was not with his troops on this attack. Of course, the attack failed with heavy casualties. It was then that troops started to desert Sector 1 for Sectors 2, 3, and 4 in the face of such heavy casualties under an

unknown and untested commander. His first operation in 3MCDO was in Sector 1 and it was the greatest blunder of the civil war. To say the least, it was a disaster. You will also read in this book how we gathered Sector 1 deserters at my Sector 3 about 300 kilometres away. See page 609.

c. It was misleading to use the word **Formation** because nothing was wrong elsewhere in the remaining three sectors, except in Owerri front; and that was Sector 1 only. 3MCDO operation area extended from Owerri front in the west to Obubra in the north-east, a distance of over 800 kilometres, and about five days' trip by road.

image

My Command Page 60, para. 2.

The rebels, having discovered a point of weakness put everything they had against 3 Marine Commando Division to widen the dent in the Division's defences into a crack. The loss of Owerri was quickly followed by the loss of Oguta. The morale of the Division sagged further as the rebels pressed for the recapture of Port Harcourt and the oil producing areas.

Comments

i. This is very misleading. The rebels discovered the dent in Sector 1 of 3MCDO because it extended from Obubra in the north-east to Port Harcourt in the south-west, a distance of over 800 kilometres and exploited it. It was when the attack on Ohoba, as ordered by Obasanjo failed, that the Biafran troops naturally pressed further south. That was Sector 1 of 3MCDO only. When Biafran troops thought that they could do the same in Sector 2 with Akinrinade, Sector 3 with Alabi-Isama and Sector 4 with Ayo Ariyo, they did not go back alive. Obasanjo arrived 3MCDO listening to George

Innih who withdrew from Iyiogugu at Owerri sector, causing the seven-month siege that Utuk had to endure. 16 Brigade and the new commander did not know or care to know that he had to listen to both sides in a dispute. His first attack failed moreso because he was not in the attack like Adekunle used to. The troops thus started to have doubts about the new commander; especially when they knew the military gaits of the two.

ii. Back in 1968, it was Oguta that was first lost on the 15th of September followed by Owerri in April 1969. The fall of Oguta to the left flank of Utuk's 16 Brigade was caused by the failure of Maj. Makanjuola on the left flank to hold Oguta. Combined with George Innih's 14 Brigade failure on the right flank, they were the main reasons for the failure at Owerri. In any case, the question was, why attack Oguta, Owerri and Aba in the first place? What was the AIM? That was why Adekunle himself fell short.

iii. Obasanjo kept using the word FORMATION and DIVISION when he meant Sector 1. This is highly misleading. The morale of Sector 1, and not the entire division, sagged further as the Biafran troops pressed for the recapture of Port Harcourt and the oil producing areas; a situation for which he had no answer. That was when I went to him in Port Harcourt and insisted that he must listen to me before we all got deeper into trouble and to reappraise the Pincer plans, unless he had a better plan to offer and he never had one.

My Command Page 61, para. 1.

According to Army Headquarters Operational Instruction, Divisions had responsibilities as follows.

1 Division

- a. Take over from 2 Division in Onitsha Area.
- b. Advance to Nnewi and beyond.
- c. Capture Orlu and exploit forward.

2 Division.

- a. Defend Midwest.
- b. Hold defensive position along River Niger to prevent Infiltration from across the river into Midwest.

3 Marine Commandos

- a. Stabilize and Straighten defensive line.
- b. Recapture Owerri and exploit forward.
- c. Recapture Oguta and Exploit forward.

Comments

i. These instructions were militarily tactless. They were the type of orders we were taught in cadet schools to give to sections of ten men. They could not have been issued by the Nigerian Army HQ to divisional level formations, and if so, then Col. Oluleye who was an Indian Staff College trained GSOF must have had no idea about military strategy and plans, which is highly doubtful.

ii. To explain how pedestrian these instructions were: In the case of instructions to 1 Division, it is alleged to have said, 'Advance to Nnewi and beyond,' and to, "Capture Orlu and exploit forward". But 1 Division did not go to Orlu; they went to Okigwe which was captured on October 1st, 1968

and later Umuahia on April 22, 1969. The so-called AHQ instructions quoted here was dated May 1969. 1 Division did not attack Orlu after Umuahia. 1 Division and 3MCDO only linked up at Orlu and Umuahia during the final battle for Biafra's centre of gravity (Uli-Ihiala) and the collapse of Biafra — January 7-12 1970.

iii. The so-called instructions to 3 Marine Commandos were even more elementary and not at the level of an army division. Why would you issue such instructions like, "Stabilise and straighten defensive lines?" What would have been the reason or reasons for straightening a line of defence in battle? We were not on ceremonial parade. This instruction, I am sure, could not have come from AHQ of the Nigerian Army in Lagos.

image

Of course the army needs straight lines on ceremonial parades, or engineering drawing. But a defensible line should be where it would be difficult for the enemy to easily attack without regretting doing so, or for political reasons, like that of 3MCDO before Adekunle's Operation OAU. The positions of 3MCDO before the OAU misadventure were along the state boundaries of the then South Eastern and Rivers States.

Then the next alleged instruction was for 3 Marine Commando to recapture Owerri and exploit forward. Again, what was the AIM? In World War II, capturing main centres of communication and liberating major towns from the Nazis were important, but not all the towns were necessary to be captured. For instance, General Douglas MacArthur of the United States Army did not have to capture all the islands in the Pacific during World War II. He captured the key or the major islands that made it difficult for the Japanese to

communicate with each other on the other islands thereby disrupting the enemy's line of communication. That was strategy. We only needed Uli-Ihiala which was then Biafra's centre of gravity.

The instruction was alleged to have said, "Recapture Oguta and exploit forward". Again, what was the AIM? Generals have to see not only the battle but the entire campaign and war. What would have been the use of Oguta if as in 3 Division, Owerri was first to be captured, when Uli-Ihiala was their centre of gravity? Why divert forces again to Oguta? I believe that generals must play more chess because you do not have to capture all the pawns to checkmate the king and end the game. For instance, 1 Division captured Umuahia in April 1969, but that did not end the war, until Biafra's centre of gravity, Uli-Ihiala, was captured ten months later by 3 MCDO dream team. A military centre of gravity is the source of strength, power, and resistance. Simple. Not Oguta, Owerri, Aba or Umuahia; it was Uli-Ihiala in this case.

iv. This was the bone of contention in 3MCDO first between Adekunle and I, and later between Obasanjo and I. We did not need more casualties on both sides to end the war. My feeling was that Col. Obasanjo's ego made him arrange my transfer to I Division at Enugu to enable him keep Akinrinade and adopt Operation Pincer 2 as his own thought-out plan. His preferred Operation Pincer I was rejected by 1 Division and his own World War I and II ideas were not successful at Ohoba just about 40 kilometres south of Owerri. It is true that one should learn how to manage one's boss but I could not stop drumming it into his ears that a fire brigade approach would cause many casualties and not solve the problem at hand. So, I went on redeployment for which I thank the Lord. I would probably have died in the final battle for Uli-Ihiala. In case situations

anywhere deteriorated in the war front, it was either Akinrinade or Alabi-Isama that would be transferred there in a fake reorganisation exercise. That actually was why we kept talking before things went very wrong.

image

Chapter VII of *My Command* Mastering the Job

My Command Page 66, para. 2

I had been in Port Harcourt (once before) since the beginning of the war in company of chief of staff, Army Brigadier Hassan Katsina. This was in July 1968, not long after Port Harcourt was liberated.

Comments

This is true. I received the team as Chief of Staff of the division and it was after Col. Adekunle had announced Operation OAU to the press in Lagos. Akinrinade and I knew that we would be in trouble trying to capture towns just for capturing sake. We were also aware that, going into Ibo heartland without adequate preparations was a recipe for disaster, so we complained to AHQ when Col. Adekunle insisted that operation OAU was his next move, against all we had planned, practised, and prepared for. Col. Adekunle knew our next move, but how he got himself into the OAU story to the press in Lagos beat all of us, and he did not want to go back on his words. Biafran troops waited patiently for him at Aba and Owerri. Therefore, when Umuahia attack did not take place and Owerri was hot, Biafran troops thinned out of Umuahia into Owerri and 1 Division was able to capture Umuahia to our (Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama) delight.

It was in July 1968 that the name of Col. Obasanjo was first mentioned by Akinrinade and General Hassan Katsina came to Port Harcourt and Calabar with him. They were all briefed on the map. 'Mastering the Job' is very appropriate heading. It is very unfortunate but this is a fact because he

(Obasanjo) had no previous experience in commanding an infantry battalion or a brigade. He was completely lost on what to do and too shy to discuss with Alabi-Isama or Akinrinade.

However, since he said he was briefed earlier before Akinrinade and I did by Major George Innih, he must have noticed just as shown on Map 6 in his book *My Command*, that 14 Brigade commanded by Major Innih to the right flank of Utuk's 16 Brigade in Sector 1 withdrew from Inyioyugu, right of Owerri and put Utuk in trouble. The map speaks for itself. Innih put Sector 1 of 3MCDO in trouble.



These were 3MCDO positions after operation OAU in May 1969. Before Col. Obasanjo took over command, Adekunle had crossed into Ibo heartland without a plan. Owerri was lost, Oguta was also lost on the left, and George Innih withdrew from Inyioyugu on the right of Owerri on Owerri-Umuahia road, but Aba and Ikot Ekpene were held up to Obubra in the North-east and Onoku in the North-West of the map.

My Command Page 66, para. 2.

However, Major Innih had a carefully marked military map which he had shown me in the army headquarters and which he still wanted me to study probably not knowing that I was more distressed than impressed by it. The situation as shown on the map and painted by Major Innih, was bleak.

Comments

Col Obasanjo's Map 6 on page 62 of his book, *My Command* on which he was briefed is not accurate.

Instead of Major Innih withdrawing to Amafor, or at worst to Olakwo, some 20 to 25 kilometres south of Owerri from Inyiogugu, he withdrew to Chokocho where Major Ola Oni was holding his ground about 80 kilometres away. Major Innih just ran, and so did his troops. The sector commander himself, Lt. Col. Godwin Ally did not know what to do. He was not there, and he had no command post. But for Major Ola Oni's troops that held their ground in a do-or-die situation at Chokocho, it was possible that Biafran troops could have reached Port Harcourt if they pushed harder. Thereafter, Innih was posted to 3MCDO HQ as a staff officer by Adekunle, while Maj. Ola Oni took over Innih's 14 Brigade, and moved forward.

If 14 Brigade had withdrawn tactically, the situation would have been different. But the entire 14 Brigade returned as stragglers to Chokocho. 15 Brigade under the command of Maj. Makanjuola also ran back to Omoku and Ahoada, leaving Utuk's 16 Brigade left flank inside Owerri empty, and so Utuk alone bore the brunt of Biafran onslaughts for seven months. All these happened in Sector 1.



This was Obasanjo's first visit to 3MCDO war front in July 1968. Gen. Katsina is third right, Obasanjo (fifth right). Alabi-Isama, (third left in beret and black jacket).

My Command Page 66, para. 3.

Disunity among officers was evidenced by the refusal of two senior officers of the Division, Lt. Col. Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama (who had in protest left the Division for Lagos), to return to the Division while the former Commander was there. These officers were convinced that they would be killed if they returned to Port Harcourt.

Comments

Col. Obasanjo's statement here is correct. Akinrinade and I left the war front for Lagos after Adekunle's planned ambush against us failed. Besides, we had a note warning us about the ambush. The note was given to Gen. Gowon, the Head of State by Akinrinade, and as at today, Adekunle himself had confirmed it to Akinrinade. Granted he was stressed out, and in the confusion, Adekunle was looking for whom to blame for his mistakes but did we, therefore, deserve death? After all, he was warned accordingly since July 1968 against what eventually happened in April/May 1969. If anything, that

was foresight on our part. The disaster happened ten months after we had warned.

The pity of the situation was that many of our soldiers died including Major Ted Hamman at Owerri. Major Alimi Ogunkanmi was shot at Owerri and paralysed, while Lt. Col. Philemon Shande was killed at Aba. Three brigades of 4,500 men went on this wild goose chase but less than 2,000 returned to base alive. Meanwhile, their commanders, Ally and Innih were drinking and dancing when Major Utuk's 16 Brigade broke out to join them. Innih quickly went to Lagos to brief the new commander, Obasanjo. But these same commanders could not punch in to join Utuk inside Owerri. Was that not incredible? In Nigeria, once you are dead, you are dead, many do not ask questions. Even now, some people die in hospitals and are kept in the mortuary and some relations do not go back to claim them.

In any case, why was it necessary to attack Oguta, Owerri and Aba? It would have been worse if Adekunle had ordered me and I refused to attack Umuahia from Sector 3.1 would have been charged for disobedience. However, for me that would have been an illegitimate order. With the situation of 3MCDO on the ground as of July 1968 when Adekunle announced his OAU plan, there was no unit of 3MCDO that was fit to advance a kilometre, let alone 80 kilometres. All our energy and materials had been expended on the 30-day advance from Calabar to capture Port Harcourt. It was not wise to advance without refitting and reorganising the troops before undergoing further major operations. But strangely, Adekunle did not return from Lagos with any supplies after 51 days, even though the pretext for his absence was that he was gathering supplies and reinforcements. Despite that failure, he still went ahead with the order to attack Aba. When Shande explained that he needed more men and time for his men to recuperate, Adekunle called Lt. Col. Shande a coward, before he plunged

in and died at Aba. Lt. Col. Shande did not refuse to attack; he died obeying orders.

A similar situation had happened earlier during the Asaba/Onitsha River Crossing operation by 2nd Division. Akinrinade warned Col. Murtala Mohammed, the divisional commander, against his crossing plans. The commander refused and went ahead with the River Crossing operation. Over 50% of the troops in that operation died and Akinrinade left the division in protest. There has never been any inquiry to ascertain what happened and why it happened that we lost so many troops. There were perhaps no records, and nobody cared.

The same situation occurred again when Col. Obasanjo arrived at 3MCDO as the commander. He ordered the disastrous attack on Ohoba, which was his first operational blunder in Sector 1, as new GOC. The outcome made soldiers wonder what stuff the new commander was made of; hence the desertion that Col. Obasanjo was writing about in his book - *My Command*. But in the book, he was putting the blame on Adekunle, his predecessor!

I wondered if our new commander read military history on El Alamein operations in North Africa between the German General, Erwin von Rommel (the Desert Fox) and British Generals Bernard Montgomery and Harold Alexander. The situation at Ohoba was similar to that of El Alamein, as will be seen shortly.

The British by 1940/41 had captured all Italian positions in North Africa until Hitler sent in General Erwin Rommel in February 1941, who attacked British positions and recaptured all areas up to the Libyan port of Tobruk which also fell into German hands in 1942. The British then finally withdrew to a tiny railway station at El Alamein. The importance of El Alamein was that it was a defensible position between the sea and the Quattara Depression; but

Rommel was about 100 kilometres to the Suez Canal. He was riding high and was even promoted Field Marshal by Hitler. Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister in his wisdom, realising that General Claude Auchinleck, the commander, was tired after such a long battle and the stalemate at Tobruk before it fell to the Germans, replaced General Auchinleck with Gen. Harold Alexander. Here again, General Gowon, on advice, replaced tired Adekunle with Obasanjo. 3MCDO was defeated at Owerri and withdrew to Ohoba as the British were defeated and withdrew to El Alamein.

In August 1942, General Montgomery took over the 8th Army. He started his plans in earnest as follows:

- a. he made himself visible to his troops by regular visits;
- b. briefed his troops what had happened which they were aware of, then what would happen and what he expected of them;
- c. he worked on his deception plan;
- d. he gathered enough intelligence of enemy movements, strengths, weaknesses, and weapons;
- e. enemy communication was broken into and many more.



I was at Mons Officer Cadet School in 1960 — From left: Ajit Singh from India, Alabi-Isama from Nigeria and Abdul Rahman from Malaysia.

All these were the information that the 3MCDO ladies got for us by mixing with the refugees in the area. Many were discovered, gang raped and killed in the process.

Finally, Gen. Montgomery dug-in to defend his position as handed over to him and to stop and defeat any enemy's further advance. So, when the enemy finally attacked Montgomery's well-prepared position, they were beaten back. For once again, the British troops saw victory and their morale went sky up.

The British Prime Minister ordered an immediate attack to pursue the retreating Germans but Gen. Montgomery did not do so until he got his reinforcements of armour, artillery pieces, aircraft and anti-tank weapons ready. He made sure he was 3:1 ratio at least in all respects to the enemy strength.

It was then that Operation Super-Charge was launched by the 8th Army of General Montgomery against Rommel and the German troops took flight. This was how we also counter-

attacked Ikot Ekpene when Biafran troops captured the town. The story is in part 2 of this book.

We lost all our intelligence gathering troops because they were ladies and the new commander said we recruited them for socials, so they were dismissed. Obasanjo then ordered the attack on Ohoba without these all important information and lost the battle for Ohoba with heavy casualties. That was his first battle at 3MCDO and the troops that did not die in the attack including walking wounded deserted to other sectors.

My Command Page 69, para. 3.

Only on one subject did I make up my mind before leaving Lagos - full payment of salaries to all soldiers. As an officer Cadet, I have been taught that to get the best out of my men I should take particular interest in their welfare, especially in their accommodation, food, salaries and leave. As things stood, the soldiers of 3 Marine Commando Division could not get leave at all and could not get their salaries in full. It had been somehow decided to save their salaries for them whether or not they needed them. They of course, got as good a diet as Operations would allow. Trenches were the best accommodation for most of them.

Comments

- i. At this time, the problem of my new boss, Col. Obasanjo was lack of war and infantry experience. The limit of his infantry knowledge was as a cadet in UK. I also attended the same Mons Officer Cadet School as Col. Obasanjo. He was there in 1958, I was there in 1960. He later converted to an army engineer.

The soldiers as pictures on the next page show perhaps had been at the war front since 1967 when the war broke out. By May 1969, when Col. Obasanjo arrived 3MCDO, the same soldiers, if lucky and had not yet been wounded or killed were still fighting. But where would they keep two years' salary? In their bags or where? If shot

dead, what happens next? By any language, it is silly for any officer in a war setting to ever think of paying full salaries to troops in any war front. That was why we devised allotment documents for the troops' families back home.

- ii. At Mons Officer Cadet School in England, where we were taught as cadets, the country had a welfare system for all its citizens that works. Do we have one in Nigeria? Especially, where such monies might have been made away with by thieves and vagabonds who used their offices to make away with dead or 'unknown soldier's' funds? What we were taught were basic rudiments on how to get things done. We were left to confront situations as they happened on the ground. That is what we know as initiative.



Where will these men here keep their salaries? This is a typical 3MCDO terrain. So we devised the system of salary allotment to families back home, as the soldier could have been his family's bread winner. He had nothing to buy with money in the war front, and his family had to pay house rent and children's school fees, including the upkeep of perhaps aged parents.



Adekunle leading an attack

My Command Page 69, para. 4.

After I had been briefed by the principal staff officers in the Headquarters on their respective branches, I asked Lt Col Godwin Ally to produce for implementation within forty-eight hours a written appreciation on paper on an attack on Ohoba, fifteen miles from Owerri. The aim was to hit the rebels as close to their base as possible so that they would stop or withdraw from their southward thrust on Port Harcourt. I needed some respite to study the situation in detail. The planned Ohoba operation was also necessary to forestall what I expected the rebels would do — hit hard during the transitional period of the change of command.



Utuk and some of his 16 Brigade troops that broke out of Owerri. About 1,500 had died, missing, or captured by Biafrans.

Comments

- i. Interesting! Did they know how many Biafran troops they were up against? Biafran troops were already waiting for them because they were too close for comfort, and were already knocking at the door leading to their centre of gravity, a place that they could not afford to lose — Owerri. Obasanjo thought that it was easy, that he could just attack and the Biafran troops would run away. But he was wrong. That was why we had over a thousand dead, and many more wounded in the Ohoba attack, more so because he included in his attacking force troops besieged and traumatised for seven months in Owerri and were just recuperating. What a tragedy!

After the new commander had been briefed, the next thing would have been for him to make a complete plan of his own since that happened to be his first

operation as the new commander. But he miscalculated. The “Battle of the Bulge” of the WW II, which was also similar to this situation could be another reference point. General Ike Eisenhower did not counterattack Bastogne just to hit the enemy close to his base. He studied the situation, General Omar Bradley was to dig-in seriously to prevent further enemy advance while he counter-attacked south with General Patton and north with Montgomery and thereby defeated the enemy. This was what was done to end the war and Obasanjo was not even there.

ii. Lord Montgomery of El Alamein fame in North Africa during WW II did not just go into battle to hit the Nazis close to their base when he took over command of the 8th Army in 1942, he built up the morale of his troops by reinforcements in arms, supplies, and training. He gathered enough intelligence on Nazi positions and made deception plans before attacking. Obasanjo probably did not read enough of military history to appreciate these as necessity for success especially when the troops had been defeated once or twice in the same campaign. If an enemy is attacked frontally and piecemeal, it is like knocking one’s head on a wall. One will have a headache for a long time. In this case, we had a serious headache. The Biafrans not only beat back this attack, they continued their advance southwards, towards Port Harcourt, which improved their morale, and demoralised our troops. Even if Ohoba was captured, what was the AIM? Was it worth the casualties inflicted on our men?

iii. Akinrinade and I did not have monopoly of knowledge on military tactics and strategy. All we asked for was an audience, because when a mess was created, and things went wrong, it was either Akinrinade or Alabi-Isama that would eventually be

sent to get the mess cleaned up. When Adekunle failed at Aba, he sent Akinrinade there. When Biafran troops recaptured Ikot Ekpene, Alabi-Isama was sent there. I was not their commander at Ikot Ekpene. We should have sat down and worked out a new plan before attacking Oguta and Owerri. We warned Adekunle. We were back to the same thing with Obasanjo where a mediocre plan led to no results except pain and casualties.

iv. All the new commander, Col. Obasanjo's plans failed so far.



Port Harcourt hospital was full of casualties, including the walkways. Result of Obasanjo's failed Ohoba attack.

My Command Page 69, para. 5.

I left the office to visit the hospital-----

I was made to appreciate the problems, difficulties and agonies of the soldiers at the battle front by talking to almost every patient in the hospital.

Comments

- a. I was happy to read that after his visit to the hospitals in Port Harcourt, he appreciated what the troops went through in the hands of incompetent and inefficient officers and leaders. If Col. Obasanjo took part in the attack, like Adekunle used to do before his grand operation OAU and carried dying soldiers and listened to what they had to say before they died, as Akinrinade and myself did most of the time, he would have appreciated the point made here a little more and why we were always concerned about casualties.
- b. This was what Akinrinade and I went through everyday for over two years in the battle front and with various units and commanders which had direct bearing on our thoughts, plans and execution of plans, tactics and strategy. These soldiers were children of people and we, the officers were like their parents and all they had at the war front.
- c. Obasanjo's visit was to Delta Hospital in Port Harcourt and that was in Sector 1. Each sector set up its own hospital in their area of operation. Did he see casualties in other sectors? He did not even visit hospitals in the other sectors, not at my Sector 3 anyway.

My Command Pages 70, para. 5.

May 18 was the first anniversary of the liberation of Port Harcourt by the Federal troops. With the Rivers State Government established in Port Harcourt, the anniversary of liberation was celebrated with pomp and pageantry. A parade at the Stadium was followed by cultural display of the Rivers people and traditional waist wriggling of exquisitely beautiful Rivers women.

Comments

The Rivers State Government was already one year established when Col. Obasanjo arrived Port Harcourt on May 16th, 1969. The state was settled with hotels, night clubs and schools already opened. The first school that we opened was the Stella Maris School for girls. The new commander, Col. Olusegun Obasanjo, had no plan of his own yet. So, he told the same person who was sitting in his office while Utuk's 16 Brigade broke out of the Owerri siege, i.e. Lt. Col. Ally to make a plan within 48 hours. Neither he nor the new commander had any plans! That was one of the points we had made. One thought that engineers make plans or drawings at least. By May 18th 1968, when we captured Port Harcourt, the waists of those beautiful women he described could not wriggle due to hunger, disease, and kwashiokor.

My Command Page 71, para. 3.

On 19 May I visited Elele with Major George Innih to see how No 1 Sector was preparing for the Ohoba operation of the following day. Men had been ear-marked for his operation among the new reinforcements but there were no officers. I was told that the officers of 16 Brigade which had just pulled out of Owerri with severe losses had refused to take part in any operation.

Comments

On May 19th, the new commander visited Elele with Major Innih. The troops knew Maj. Innih very well. Col. Obasanjo did not describe how they were received. But until the war ended, Obasanjo never went back to Ohoba, and he transferred Innih to far away Ikot Ekpene. The officers and men of 16 Brigade who were beleaguered for about seven months, came out rag-tag, looking like skeletons. There had been 1,500 of them but only 500 came out alive; and these 500 traumatised men were then ordered by Obasanjo to go back and attack the same place. By April 29th, 1969, the last of these men broke out of their siege in Owerri. By the 19th of May, barely 20 days later, a new commander, without any plan of his own and without any reinforcement ordered that the same men should take part in an attack

into the same place where they lost over 1,000 of their comrades. Why would you do that? Here we are with the same commander preaching rest area for troops, and condemning Adekunle for not allowing any rest or leave for his troops. The 3MCDO Division had over 50,000 men all over their operational area from Obubra to Port Harcourt. We also had 18 brigade of 1500 men in reserve at Itu since April 17th, 1968 more than a year without seeing any action. Could we not have replaced these tired and spent men? So, these remaining 500 men of the beleaguered 16 Brigade were to join their dead comrades who were mauled down and interred in unmarked graves or left to vultures for meals, in a place they came out of barely 20 days earlier after a seven-month siege. This was the cruelty implicit in Obasanjo's action.

Page 71, para. 3.

After I had talked to the officers they agreed to take part in the operation under Maj. A. Aliyu. I was entertained by the Tiv Cultural dance troupe of the Division at the Sector Headquarters.

Comments

So, the new commander Col. Obasanjo with no plan ordered them to take part in the counter-attack. According to him, he talked to them. They did, because like every soldier we had to obey the last order, and to quote the popular Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the *zombies* went on the attack, and they were beaten back and suffered casualties again. Who would do that as a father, as a commander and a leader? They had nobody to talk for them, and we, Akinrinade and myself, could not do more than shout and cry. We did and were made to suffer for it. The question is why, other than incompetence and lack of experience.

Page 71, para. 4.

The operation did not take off in time as planned for 20 May. By 9 o'clock in the morning when I arrived at the assembly area, ammunition was being issued.

Comments

The operation did not take off in time as planned. Was there any other sector in 3MCDO ordered by Adekunle, Akinrinade, Alabi-Isama or Ayo Ariyo to attack by 6.00a.m and we ourselves would not have been there by 5.00a.m. side by side advancing with them? That was the height of indiscipline in Sector 1, which was not acceptable to the rest of us. We had a standard operating procedure (SOP) when going into battle; some of these procedures were:

- address troops at assembly area;
- inspect weapons;
- issue ammunition and check equipment;
- pre-attack fire plan and action;
- final 'O Group' with all officers concerned; and
- present 30 minutes to 'H' Hour. -All these were done two to three hours before 'H' Hour(Attacking Time).

Col. Obasanjo came to Azumini to see my attack operations there. He saw that we left exactly on time as planned, and one hour before the attack there were artillery and mortar fire to soften the ground for advancing troops, and by 6.00a.m., it was all over. The only person missing was Obasanjo himself. He ran back to Port Harcourt, may be to get some ammunition. Adekunle would have called him a 'coward' here.

My Command Page 71, para. 4.

They advanced for some half a mile suffering slight casualties. It was the first determined advance along that sector since the withdrawal from Owerri. They stopped just short of capturing Afrola, a twin-sister village with Ohoba.

Comments

They advanced for some half a kilometre, suffering slight casualties. Obasanjo himself was not there to see the success or failure of his first attack plan as a divisional commander. Well, what is 'slight casualties' when 1,000 troops died in just one hour of battle? How many did we need to count as dead or wounded before the casualties will be termed as slight? So, the troops started to desert the unit, yet, Obasanjo blamed Adekunle once more.



Vultures were everywhere in Section 1 of 3MCDO war front. Who will have a child and pray that his end should be in the mouth of vultures and perhaps with his salary for more than six months in his pocket? What a celebration of life.. All for One Nigeria. Many of these deaths were preventable.

My Command Page 71, para. 4.

On our way back I, with the sector commander narrowly missed death in an ambush. In an attempt to get to know the ground, I had asked the sector commander to take me through alternative route.

Comments

Col. Obasanjo was talking about Major Iluyomade in this paragraph. He went on inspection and he followed the Major. However, when firing became heavy, he (Obasanjo) ran into his landrover in an attempt to run away. He (Obasanjo) was shot in the buttock. He was not ambushed. He just ran away. To be shot in the buttock, he must be backing the enemy. For the new commander to have fallen into an ambush, then successfully reverse the vehicle and get away must mean an inexperienced Biafran ambush commander was at the other end, or the story is fiction. This is a comic relief, but I am not sure how many people would be entertained. On the way to where? Was it before the attack or after our troops had been defeated?

The point being made here though, is that Obasanjo, already briefed by Akinrinade and I at Ibadan, plus the briefing by Major George Innih in Lagos, he could have made his own new plan on the map like any seasoned infantry officer would do. Then he would have factored intelligence reports (if any) into his overall planning when he got to Port Harcourt. If I had been the new commander, that is what I would have done. Ask for the intelligence report of the area, and since I wanted to show the staff what I am made of as their new commander, I would have asked for massive artillery and air support and re-inforcement of at least 3 or 4 to 1 of the enemy. Here, the new commander did not have the intelligence report on enemy strength and deployment. What a pity?



Below the line are positions of 3MCDO in May 1969, when Col. Obasanjo took over the command at Port Harcourt.

Even if it is generally true that no plan survives contact with the enemy, in the infantry, no one makes a plan of attack without knowing what he is up against. Again, the 3MCDO Division had over 50,000 troops spread from Obubura in the north-east of South-eastern State, to Degema in the south-west of Rivers State. I would not have committed the same seven-month beleaguered troops into battle after only 20 days of being out of such an ordeal. They would still have been talking about it. Here again Obasanjo was writing for an audience unfamiliar with the issues, like voting N30,000 (thirty thousand naira) for Col. Tarfa to buy horse whips in order to clear traffic in metropolitan Lagos when he was military head of state. The order was, "Just whip the people," the road traffic will be clear; kind of like, "Let us use black magic to stop Apartheid in South Africa". What a joke! He complained already that troops had no leave in 3MCDO and that trenches were their homes. So where did he then think

the homes of the 500 beleaguered troops during their seven months of encirclement in Owerri were?

Only 1,500 troops were needed, and these troops could have been exchanged with fresh troops from the other sectors. That was what we advised. I was ready to give him the new troops needed. The land they defended so bravely finally became their burial ground because of a new commander who ran away when the attack started, because the enemy had seen him, or that he was going over 300 kilometres away to get ammunition and help for advancing troops. What a commander in battle!

I see Obasanjo's *My Command* as being more of self-aggrandising fiction than the military history of the civil war, as far as 3MCDO operational area was concerned. There are three main points that need to be re-emphasised here for posterity.

Firstly, the 3MCDO Division had four sectors of operation at the time of Col. Olusegun Obasanjo's arrival in the division on May 16th, 1969 and only Sector 1 had major operational problems because of their leadership. It would be curious indeed for anybody who had read about the Jos or Boko Haram crises in Nigeria, for example, to claim that the entire Nigerian nation has the same problem and are being attacked by Boko Haram from Kano to Lagos, or from Shaki to Calabar. This would be too much of an exaggeration and would not be a true story.

Secondly, in the infantry, when a new commander takes over a unit, be it in peace or in a war setting like the 3MCDO in the war theatre, the new commander is expected to study the situation both on the map, because it is over a large operational area, then on the ground because he has to be objective and realistic in his thinking. The counter-attack of Ikot Ekpene is an example of how such attacks might be planned. Just listen to the commander on ground who is

immediately concerned. Then, of course, he might or might not listen to the briefings of those on the ground. But it is usually advisable to listen, even if it is for listening sake. The worst thing, however, is to expect those who had failed already to make all the plans for you to execute without your own major input, and then expect success. If they had a better plan, there would not have been a problem in the first instance. This was the situation at Ohoba some 40 kilometres South of Owerri commanded by Lt. Col. Godwin Ally. Col. Obasanjo did not come with a plan, nor did he make one; but he ordered Lt. Col. Godwin Ally whose sector had failed to make a plan. Both Godwin Ally and Obasanjo, the commander, did not take part in this all-important attack. Of course, the operation failed. But when there were casualties and troops started to desert Obasanjo the author, retrospectively blamed the former commander, Col. Adekunle and the entire 3MCDO Division for his shortcomings.

It was at this stage that we realised the type of commander we had just got.

- a) He was not at the preparation of this so important an operation.
- b) He did not take part in the preparation of the attack.

He did not have to be in a hurry for any reason. What we advised that he should do was very simple. In infantry, this is what we call counter-offensive or counter-attack. Since the troops had earlier been defeated in their last operation, he needed to do the following among others:

- (i) get a proper briefing on the map and on the ground to appraise the situation personally;
- (ii) exchange the tired troops with others in the division;

- iii) beef up their strength to a minimum of 3:1 ratio of the enemy. To do that, he had to know the strength of the enemy in the area including the pattern of their defences i.e. the extent in width and depth, including their weapons;
- iv) enemy preparedness and their reinforcement capability;
- v) tactics to use to counter enemy defensive plan;
- vi) check and assess realistically, the training and the morale of his troops.
- vii) put up aggressive patrols of the area to dominate no man's land and obtain needed information, by capturing POW for interrogation.
- viii) Air and artillery support are very important for at least an hour or two before the troops advance.

In any case, what was the AIM of the attack that was planned and was considered to be worth the envisaged casualties, especially of the already traumatised and badly shaken troops who had not eaten well, and had been eating their dead comrades for seven months and drinking their own urine. They watched many of their wounded comrades bleed to death including their Brigade Major Ted Hamman.

For example, if one had to capture a town with the AIM of collecting taxes, then one would be silly to kill all the people from whom the taxes would be collected. Your AIM, if well defined, would dictate your action.

These troops that were launched into Ohoba attack did not see fresh troops or, new weapons. The new commander was not there to lead the attack. To make matters worse, the

new commander insisted that the same 500 skeletons must attack again. So he addressed them to convince them to go on the operation just 20 days after their break-out of a seven month siege.

Obasanjo did not know what to do and had rejected the advice of all concerned. In the meantime, he had discredited the commando ladies who were the source of our intelligence gathering efforts of enemy positions, preparedness, training and weapons. He also did not appreciate the fact that it was not all officers that were attacking commanders. Some psychology was needed here to select an appropriate counter-attack commander for the job rather than the fire brigade approach method that was applied in this case.

As this happened to have been his first operation and battle experience, he needed to have painstakingly planned it and see it through. He wrote about a non-existent Apollo Battalion.

Where was Apollo Battalion (Obasanjo's so-called reserve) at Ohoba operation, or did he attack without a reserve? He just did not have one. He must have read that in a military book the night before.

Thirdly, when he finally listened to the advice of those on the ground, his ego did not let him acknowledge it, perhaps because he wanted the glory and honour for himself alone, and he claimed that it was his plan. We were just worried about the result of faulty and illegitimate orders that led to so many casualties. But before anyone could cry foul, he got those concerned discredited. Col. Obasanjo's alleged military plan, tactics and strategy that ended the war was reported worldwide as 'Operation Tail Wind'. But where is the plan, and where are the maps related to 'Operation Tail Wind' even in his book *My Command*? He did not have any, and here I have produced it in pictures with the related and

correct maps. Those who made the plans were Alabi-Isama, Akinrinade and Tomoye. Alabi-Isama who initiated the plan, was transferred to Enugu from Port Harcourt, and his 13 Brigade taken over by George Innih. On the day of the final battle to end the civil war, Lt. Col. Akinrinade told me that Col. Obasanjo was in Port Harcourt, three hundred or more kilometres away from the final battle. He sent George Innih's 13 Brigade the wrong way, to Arochukwu on the right, south-east, while the advance was to the west, leaving Akinrinade and Tomoye's Brigades to bear the brunt of Biafran counter-attacks at Owerri. Akinrinade was a staff officer, (GSOI), who was not supposed to lead the attack but he did when he got fed up with planlessness which led to many casualties, the type never been experienced or seen in 3MCDO since the war started.

The Biafrans had already surrendered to Tomoye and Akinrinade when George Innih finally arrived with 13 Brigade, the fourth day after the battle and the war was over. Akinrinade then told Col. Obasanjo, in annoyance on the operational radio, that he would not like to see George Innih near him again, or he would shoot him. But how did Col. Obasanjo expect George Innih commanding 13 Brigade, the largest brigade in 3MCDO, to swing right to Arochukwu, some 150 kilometres away, and then pivot left, for another 200 kilometres to join in the most important battle for Biafra's centre of gravity -the last battle? How fit would the men be on arrival for battle? Think of about 3,500 men in a war setting jingling around the countryside and then turning back. How many vehicles are we talking about here? Did they have the vehicles that would be needed to achieve this? They were not on picnic, or ceremonial parade!

Where were the imaginary enemies that 13 Brigade was going to fight at Arochukwu? 18 Brigade had been near Arochukwu since April 17th 1968. They were deployed there

just to contain Arochukwu because we wanted to avoid a flank attack from Biafran Col. Simon Uwakwe.

With 17 Brigade commanded by Maj. S.S. Tomoye, 12 Brigade commanded by Isemmede, and 14 Brigade commanded by Maj. Ola Oni, Akinrinade set up a command post and went for Biafra's centre of gravity at Uli-Ihiala, bypassing Owerri while tactically containing it.

He, Akinrinade never came back to 3MCDO HQ at Port Harcourt again until Biafran officers and men surrendered and the war ended. Here this is how it all happened and Obasanjo the new commander was not there. Biafran emissary, Col. J. Achuzia waving a white flag approached 3 MCDO front line that they (all Biafran troops) have come to surrender to the commander of the Federal troops. Then Major S. Tomoye of 17 Brigade and Lt. Col. Akinrinade, the GSOL together went to meet with Effiong, the acting Head of State of Biafra at Amichi, with Ola Oni standing by for battle.

Naturally, Akinrinade called his commander, Col. Obasanjo, and notified him that Biafran officers and men had surrendered to him at Amichi. Obasanjo got lost as he did not know how to get to Amichi. He could not find Akinrinade and Tomoye but joined them, hours later through an escort at Amichi, to meet Effiong and later posed (alone) for a photograph on the Uli airstrip with soldiers in the background. How could Obasanjo find them, when he did not send them anywhere in particular?

Maj. S.S. Tomoye was, until posted to take command of 17 Brigade, my deputy in Sector 3, and was part of the original planning team for Operation Pincer 2. He was on operational radio with me even after I was transferred to Enugu by Col. Obasanjo. I set up my war room in Justice Aniagolu's house in the New Haven area of Enugu with an RS301 operational radio, in contact with the 'Dream Team' as they advanced. It was like Ishola Folorunsho of the good old soccer

commentary days in Nigeria. The team was brilliant; the moves were as planned, advancing between enemy gaps. Before the Biafrans knew it, Akinrinade and his team, supported by 122 mm artillery, were threatening Uli-Ihiala. Ojukwu fled on the night of January 9/10. Ojukwu was able to escape firstly because our commando ladies who always mixed with refugees to secure strategic targets like bridges, airports, waterworks, electric stations and telecommunication outfits were already declared unwanted by Obasanjo, and secondly, the 13 Brigade that was to be assigned the capture of the airport at Uli-Ihiala went the wrong way with Obasanjo to Arochukwu.



Justice Anigolu's house at New Haven Enugu which housed my war room December 1969.

On Jan. 14, with Lt. Col. George Innih providing security, Col. Obasanjo met in Owerri with an expanded team of Biafran officers prior to their trip to Lagos to sign the formal surrender instrument with General Gowon in Dodan Barracks on January 15, 1970.

'Operation Tail Wind' by Obasanjo was not real. He had little to do with its conceptualisation, planning and execution. The points made here are substantiated with facts, figures, maps and photographs. The aim here,

however, is not to criticise or complain, but to put the records straight and to give honour to whom honour is due.

It is, however, understandable, because Col. Obasanjo was not an infantry officer and had no previous battle or campaign experience when he got to Port Harcourt in May 1969. Even then, his only battle in six months as commander of the 3MCDO was at Ohoba and it was a disaster. As a matter of fact, he was not even there. He only told Godwin Ally to get on with it, while Ally likewise told his men to get on with it too. Otherwise, where were they when so many got killed?

I personally give glory to God that the executors of Operation Pincer 2 planned and executed it. The plan worked. It was planned to end in 30 days but ended in 23 days. Unfortunately, only Major S.S. Tomoye did not get back to his parents. He died in a vehicle accident on the very day that the war ended after the Biafrans surrendered in the field at Amichi. Alas, SST, as I called him, is not here today with us to see how, as they say in Nigeria, *Monkey dey work, baboon dey chop*.

My Command Page 72, para. 2.

I held the first conference with all commanders, head of supporting arms and services and the staff officers on the evening of 20 May. By now, Lt. Cols. Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama to whom I had refused permission to travel with me from Lagos to Port Harcourt as it would have undermined discipline had joined the Division.

Comments

From the sentence, it is now clear that Col. Obasanjo harboured passive-aggressive misgivings against Akinrinade and myself because we got him posted to the war front which he had tried to avoid.

Before leaving Lagos I had hinted that if formal charges were preferred against these two officers by their former commander for any offence, they would be dealt with according to military law. But up to the time when I left

Port Harcourt at the end of the civil war no charges had been preferred against them.

Comments

He expected a military charge against both of us (Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama), even when the Head of State, Gen. Gowon physically had the attempted murder note, which we got from Capt. Richard, the leader of the ambush party. There were witnesses. The same note that warned us about the ambush was shown to Obasanjo in Ibadan. In any case, Adekunle had since confirmed these events in discussions with Akinrinade in 1980.

Page 72, para. 5.

After I had stopped several statements of recrimination and vilification, fair, free, honest and useful comments and remarks were made by many of the officers present. Comments were made under four broad headings - operations, training, welfare and discipline. The conference showed me another side of human behavior when officers who only a week earlier had been very close to their former commander were in my presence castigating him and describing him in unprintable words. I stopped them but I learnt a good lesson from this type of human behavior.

Comments

I had not met any officer or soldier of 3MCDO Division who spoke ill of Adekunle. It was Lt. Gen. Alani Akinrinade (rtd.) that got me a copy of Obasanjo's book, *My Command*. Akinrinade had earlier warned me that I would surely be sick reading the book and I was. The book is most revealing. It is a fallacy and is inconsistent with the truth.

Page 72, para. 6.

During the conference it became clear that the Division did not change its method and plans of operation which had been successfully employed in the riverine and comparatively friendly areas of Mid-West, South-East and Rivers States. When it started to operate wholly on land and in more hostile Ibo areas.

Comments

Col. Obasanjo was briefed in Ibadan on this very subject. Correct identification and analyses of centres of gravity were the most important challenges facing us in planning the campaign into the Ibo heartland to end the war. The failure to change tactics and plans after capturing Port Harcourt, was the bone of contention. Then we started having lots of casualties. Officers and men that we knew so well, were getting killed one by one.

Page 72, para. 6.

And without adequate reserves, ground was lost as easily as it had been gained to the utter demoralisation of the troops who up till then had never suffered severe set-backs.

Comments

There were four sectors in 3MCDO. Only Sector 1 lost any ground at the time of his arrival in 3MCDO by May 1969. The other Sectors — 2 (Akinrinade) in Aba, 3 (Alabi-Isama) at Ikot Ekpene, 4 (Ayo Ariyo) in Calabar, were stabilised by May 1969 and until the war ended, no Biafran troops ever tried attacking these three other sectors and got away alive. They never did.

Page 73 para. 1

With poor level of training of soldiers, inadequate welfare facilities and with reverses on almost all fronts of the formation, morale and discipline dipped right down. The presence of the so-called 'commando girls' and their employment within the Division did not help discipline.

Comments

How could troops that advanced 480 kilometres in 30 days, attacking, defending, crossing rivers, building pontoons, wading through jungle and mangrove forests be regarded as having no discipline? It was the new commander that was green, with no battle experience and nervous. Pity that he thought that the heroic 3MCDO ladies employed for various duties were ill-disciplined.

Page 73 para. 4.

I visited No. 1 Sector on 22 May. The Sector had three brigades, 15, 16 and STF, under its command and its operational responsibility stretched from the Orashi River on the left to Otamiri on the right. 15 Brigade under Captain Idoko and later under Major Iluyomade had its headquarters in Ahoada with its troops stretching across its entire frontage up to Apani and running into the troops of 16 Brigade which had just pulled out of Owerri badly shaken.

Comments

Badly shaken 16 Brigade troops were ordered by Obasanjo to counter-attack Ohoba (please read page 71 paragraph (3) of *My Command*). They had already failed even before they set out. Yet, the new commander pressed them to take part in the attack, because he lacked creative ideas on what to do next. He did not listen to those who knew what to do. Though, he had no war experience. So Col. Obasanjo knew that the men he ordered to attack Ohoba were badly shaken, because in exactly one hour of battle, 1000 men were counted dead.

Page 73, para. 4 contd. on page 74, para.1

The third brigade which should have been under command of Major Aliyu was not properly organized. It consisted of troops hurriedly put together to save Owerri and given the designation STF -SPECIAL TASK FORCE.

Comments

That was the beginning of the end of Adekunle. His failure to effect a proper reorganisation of his troops to meet the new challenges and when he finally experienced what we warned him against, he started reinforcing failure. The men that Col. Obasanjo labelled as nothing special were the men who advanced with me from Calabar to Opobo. 500 of them crossed Opobo River by swimming, while 1,000 crossed by dug-out paddled canoes. This special task force commanded by Maj. Aliyu captured Bori, Aletu and operated behind enemy lines up to Port Harcourt. They had no casualties for

480 kilometres of operation from Calabar to Port Harcourt. These were the same men that advanced with me from Calabar to Obubra. Yet Obasanjo claimed they were badly trained! These same men commanded by Major Aliyu captured Afikpo which was handed over to troops of 1 Division in February 1968. What training programme did Obasanjo put in place when he took over command of 3MCDO or anything brilliant that he initiated which was not already there?

Page 74, para. 1.

What I saw of this Sector which was the most pressed Sector of the Division then did not please me. The attitude of the commander who was feeling very resentful, having been passed over for promotion, was laissez-faire and uninterested.

Comments

The new commander (Col. Obasanjo) noticed that the Sector 1 Commander (Col. Godwin Ally) was uninterested and had a laissez-faire attitude to work and the operation. Did this apply to all 65 officers, and another 60,000 troops of 3MCDO? If I were the new commander and noticed such a situation in one sector, with my eye on morale, I would have changed them all and sent them (i.e. Sector 1) back to the rest area he claimed he wanted to establish, or place them in a defensive role. This was the same sector that entertained Obasanjo with a Tiv cultural dance. What a story. In Obasanjo's entire visit to other sectors, did he attend any cultural shows? The officer described here by Col. Obasanjo was the same commander Godwin Ally that Obasanjo ordered to make Ohoba plan of attack for him. Both of them — Ally and Obasanjo sent their men to their grave at Ohoba while they went away to Port Harcourt awaiting the result of the attack. It was a complete disaster.

Page 74, para. 3.

To confound the already precarious situation and to dishearten me further, the rebel aircraft which had been non-active for some time had rocket-

attacked Port Harcourt airport before I returned on 25 May, thanks to Count Von Rosen, the relief organizations which brought him to Biafra, and the Swedish 'neutrality' in the war. Fortunately, however, the damage done by this surprise attack was minimal: one wing of a MIG 17 fighter was perforated and some aviation fuel drums split open.

Comment

The Biafran Minicon planes, (under Von Rosen) which rocket-attacked Port Harcourt, Enugu and Benin, followed later by Sapele, Warri and Forcados in an impressive but ultimately feeble attempt at strategic bombing, came from Obilagu and Uli-Ihiala. Apart from telling Col. Obasanjo that Uli-Ihiala had become Biafra's operational ***centre of gravity***, he should have known. But since he did not know, we told him. I explained how two brigades of 3,000 men went to attack Uli-Ihiala, while 13 Brigade from Ikot Ekpene which was beefed up to about 5,000 men were sent the wrong way to Arochukwu while Akinrinade was awaiting them to join in the final battle for Uli-Ihiala. Akinrinade finally made it with 3,000 men while 13 Brigade was lost for four days on their way back from Arochukwu. That was Obasanjo's 'Tail Wind Plan.' Complete incompetence!



The commando lady making a report to Akinrinade and I in this picture did not portray indiscipline.



The picture shows a commando lady sitting beside Col. Obasanjo at a party.



Adekunle tap danced during the Calabar victory party.



Akinrinade, right, during the Port Harcourt victory party.



For 30 days across wet lands, swamps and forests, I led the 3MCDO troops (men and women) to the capture of Port Harcourt from Biafran soldiers. After such a major victory, there was reason to celebrate, and we celebrated comprehensively — the Nigerian way. Even in Calabar, the commander could be seen in different moods of victory celebration.

Victory was sweet not only for us soldiers, even international observers were sufficiently impressed by our

conduct of the war that they joined in the celebration of our victory at Uyo.



International observers dancing at Uyo party.



Lt. Col. Godwin Ally dancing second left.



I danced with my mother at Uyo.

My Command Page 75 para.3.

On Monday May 26 I visited 2 Sector. Despite my message the previous Saturday announcing my visit, the sector commander was not at his station (the sector headquarters was located in Asa). Before the messages arrived he had left his station for Uyo to spend the weekend with his friend and colleague without informing my headquarter. It was an act bordering on irresponsibility, and the commander was reprimanded for it. Fortunately, however, the brigades were also informed of my visit by my staff officers and the brigade commanders were at their posts. So the visit continued as planned and the sector commander joined us at the second brigade location.

Comment

Unfortunate. I wish we had an army that knew that photo journalists could go to the war front to record movie pictures of war events. Col. Obasanjo was always looking for a way to discredit either myself or Akinrinade, in order to hide his own shortcomings. Our only offence was that we took him, "the engineer" to the war front, for which he finally got undeserved glory. In all the pages of his book, the word "I" was used multiple times to show that he did it all alone. How can an officer like Akinrinade who even suggested his name

for the glory he got undeservedly, not wait for a new commander coming to visit his unit? We, the officers, were the only parents and family the troops had. They depended on us. Throughout the war, Akinrinade would only be at my HQ to plan the next attack, or to discuss tactics or strategy. The first town we stayed together in, but never in the same house for security reasons, was Calabar while planning for the 30-day Port Harcourt advance. Even then he was with the troops all night. That was why he was not in the 'Dream Team' picture taken on the 16th of April 1968. It was all for security reasons and nothing else. We advanced together into Port Harcourt and got caught at the Port Harcourt wharf attack together and we both almost got killed. While he was counterattacking the Biafran Navy in the creeks of Rivers State, I was counter-attacking Ikot Ekpene in the South-eastern State. We stayed the night together at Eket to attack the Biafran supply flight from Sao Tome but we did not sleep in the same tent. Col. Obasanjo was only trying to discredit Akinrinade. He knew very little, indeed next to nothing, about how we both survived the war. It was by the good grace of Almighty God and still survive until today.

The next place where Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama were co-located in the same town for the same night was Port Harcourt but never in the same house. Initially, I was at Calabar, he was at Bonny. During the advance to Port Harcourt, he was at Oron, I was at Uyo, and while I was at Opobo, he was in Bonny. When I went to Bakassi, he was at Opobo, and when I was at the RV at Aletu Eleme, he was at Okrika.



From left: Dr. Green, Ayo Ariyo, Aliyu, Adebiyi and APP. at the capture of Port Harcourt.



From left: S.S. Tomoye and Alabi-Isama talking with APP first right after the capture of Port Harcourt in May 1968. I know him well. He drinks hard liquor.

My Command Page 76, para. 1.

Talk now" I cut in and asked APP to present his points himself. I told him I would be able to understand him. He put his points across in admirably understandable 'pidgin English'. To his surprise, I replied him in equally 'pidgin English'. He entertained us to cold soft drinks, fried meat and kola nuts and appealed to me not to go forward of his battalion front line as I could easily be shot at by the rebels who were within earshot. I ignored his appeal and warning and visited his men in their trenches.

Comment

Unfortunately, this paragraph is another one of those that do not add up as a true Nigeria-Biafra war story. If APP gave Col. Obasanjo a cold drink, at the war front, with fried meat and kolanuts all within the earshot of the rebels -(what a story) then there must have been electricity in the trenches or houses to provide cold soft drink. This is a comic relief. Obasanjo did not check the type of meat that APP gave him to eat. Well, it might have been bush meat or the rump steak of dead humans like I ate unknowingly at Ugep.

Col. Obasanjo did not tell Col. Martins what type of meat it was. May be the Fulani cow rearers brought cows to Aba war front. But be careful about what you eat in the war front. Alabi-Isama, Chief of Staff of 3MCDO from Calabar to Port Harcourt, and later Sector 3 commander had neither meat nor salt in his food until the government of South-eastern State was established, but APP (African Patch Patch), the BN commander had cold soft drinks, fried meat and kolanuts to welcome the new commander. Actually the silliness is that all these happened within earshot of the enemy. What did Akinrinade, the sector commander who was at the inspection do, or what Ola Oni, the brigade commander also do? He must have killed a goat to welcome the new commander. —This is fiction; APP does not take soft drinks. In 1969, it was Krola and fizzy tablets. APP drinks hard liquor.

But this tale also betrays the fact that Col. Obasanjo saw little action if any in those last seven months at the war front. Where would one get a cold drink from if not in Port Harcourt or Calabar where the two governments were settling down to business and had electric power generators or their electric power restored at the time? You see, the states had settled down when he arrived at the war front, so he had a cold drink, kolanuts and fried meat within earshot of the enemy. APP must have had his wife doing the cooking; perhaps there was an officer's mess within earshot of the

enemy, and may be the cooking was done in their trenches. My brother Col. Obasanjo was simply not there. This is another exaggeration and fiction; one that made me laugh.

My Command Page 76, para. 2.

As I was going down towards the stream, I was welcomed with a volley of bullets and rockets. I dodged and dived and continued. Obviously I had been seen with my escort by the rebels but they shot wildly and wide of the target.

Comment

In this paragraph, Col. Obasanjo was dodging bullets and diving? In the meantime, what did Col. (Father) Pedro Martins who accompanied him to eat fried meat do? I guess he was holding a rosary and praying but finally said, "You could successfully mount the pulpit".

My Command Page 76, para. 2.

The trenches, some of them waterlogged, were in a dip hidden from observation and protected from gunfire. I talked to each soldier, jumping into their trenches to observe their field of fire. It is amazing what young soldiers kept in their trenches with them as mementos of battles fought and places captured. The mementos including telephone receivers, air-conditioners, photographs, books, shells, to mention just a few. We came back to the headquarters where I addressed other officers and men of the brigade. The Army Roman Catholic Chaplain who was with me on that visit remarked jocularly after my address that I could successfully mount the pulpit.

Comment

In the waterlogged mangrove trenches which Col. Obasanjo described and jumped into, there were fridges, air-conditioners, telephone sets, cold soft drinks, and fried meat and kolanuts. Isn't this laughable?. When I went to the forward trenches for inspection, the two soldiers in their trench stood on these things Col. Obasanjo talked about, because he also saw that the trenches were waterlogged. They were for view and to keep their feet dry. Obasanjo did not know of military terms called, 'Limb Tingling and Trench

Feet.' When I told him that these things were put in the waterlogged trenches, to avoid trench foot and limb tingling, he asked, 'what is that?' and we left it at that. In 1 Division, may be in 2 Division as well, they had the roads and the vehicles. I guess only non-military people would be impressed with such hyperbole. When I was told that Col. Obasanjo mentioned my name in his book, I went everywhere looking for the book but I could not find any military officer who had a copy. Among the few that bought it initially, most threw it into the waste paper basket. Only some civilians had the book, and even then, they couldn't find their copy. General Akinrinade brought me two copies, but warned that the book would make me sick. It sure did. When Obasanjo asked the troops why they had fridges, television, in their trenches, these men explained that due to heavy rains, the trenches were waterlogged and they had to stand on something.

My Command Page 76, para. 3.

To reach the next brigade 14 Brigade which was on the Western Side of Imo River - we had to go through Port Harcourt. The sector commander joined us on this second leg. Things in 14 Brigade were not as steady as in 17 Brigade. The brigade had suffered repeated reverses from late 1968 when it was one of the brigades ear-marked for a decisive role in operation OAU. From then on, it has steadily lost men, ground and morale.

During my speech I made reference to their sector Commander and they gazed at me in surprise. They had never met him, almost five months after the sectors had been established. The unacceptable explanation was that the sector commander was only in the sector for less than two months after its formation and he did not return until after my take-over of the Division. The brigade commander, Maj. Ola Oni, made a fast and clever move of trying to introduce the battalion commanders to the sector commander discreetly, but it was too late.

Comments

14 Brigade was the brigade commanded by Major George Innih, which brought about the Owerri problem when he withdrew from Inyiogugu. He was relieved of his command and made GSOL at the 3MCDO HQ. When Lt. Col. Shande

died at Aba and 3MCDO lost the town to Biafran troops. It was Akinrinade who was ordered to counter-attack Aba with 17 Brigade and he recaptured the town. When Sector 2 was formed, it was 14 Brigade that Akinrinade used to hold his left flank after reorganising it with Maj. Ola Oni as the new commander. In order to hold Aba, 12 Brigade from Azumini protected Akinrinade's right flank at Ogbor hill and Ikot-Ineme while 14 Brigade held his left flank at Amala, Ibido, Umuatum and Okehi with the Brigade HQ at Chokocho. So, how would they not know Akinrinade who was with them to Port Harcourt, later became their sector commander and attacked Aba while they secured his left flank? Just another way of giving a dog a bad name just to hang it.

Akinrinade never lost any ground anywhere, not even in Bonny when Col. Oluleye sent barbed wire instead of ammunition (although one infantry company was deployed from the federal guard) and not even his most difficult crisis at Onne which was allegedly lost on April 3, 1968.



Lt.Col. Alabi-Isama (holding binoculars) with soldiers in forward trench at Igrita May, 1968. Where could the soldiers have kept any loot?



This photo gives you a sense of what the soldiers were going through. What is there to loot in these thick forests? How could any of them have carried his loot into a forward trench?



Where are the looted air-conditioners here? Could air-conditioners be of use to troops on the march? 3MCDO was always on the offensive. Obasanjo's statement of looting is unfair to the dead and the living.

My Command Page 77, para.2.

Just as we were driving back to headquarters, we received the news that an outpost on River Otamiri some eight miles away had been overrun. Efforts to contain the rebels had not been too successful. I seized the opportunity to see, at firsthand, what was happening and what assistance I could lend. By the time we arrived at the scene, the battle was raging fiercely under the efficient command of the brigade major. But the situation was getting out of hand. Our men who had suffered heavy casualties were running short of ammunition.

I returned to Port Harcourt to authorize what supply of men, stores and materials would have saved the situation. Three of the men dispatched to help jumped out of the vehicles to desert. They were ordered to stop and warned that they would be shot for cowardice. Two of them obeyed and joined the rest of their colleagues in the vehicle. One refused to stop and the order was given to shoot him while he was running away. He was shot and wounded, and died later in the hospital.

Comments

The GOC used some unmilitary language in a war setting here. So, an outpost at Otamiri was overrun. Fine. The

battalion commander was there, along with the brigade commander and, of course, Akinrinade as the sector commander. But Col. Obasanjo then went back to Port Harcourt, about 150 kilometres away, to send ammunition to an outpost where they were allegedly short of ammunition. Meanwhile, they lost ground with heavy casualties — all in front of the new commander Obasanjo, with Akinrinade and Major Ola Oni present. This strange story is just to give Akinrinade's sector a bad name. Until the war ended, there was no Biafran assault in sectors 2, 3 and 4 that gained ground in a counter-attack or inflicted significant casualties on these sectors. In 3MCDO, every unit from a section of ten to a brigade of 1,500-2,000 men, was self-sufficient in all respects. Therefore, the outpost must have had their own ammunition including their reserves, company reserves, battalion reserves, brigade reserves, and sector reserves. In addition, there was no commander in 3MCDO that did not have emergency reserve ammunition in his vehicle. For the GOC, (General Officer Commanding) of the division to run back 200 kilometres away to go and get ammunition for an outpost being attacked right in front of him and the other commanders at inspection time, was nothing short of what Adekunle will call 'cowardice' in front of the enemy. We need to ask about what happened to the reserve of ammunition that he said he used to carry as extra in his vehicle. As soon as the battle got tough, the boss bolted away for dear life and, of course, to get ammunition and help. Did Col. Obasanjo help to carry any of the dead or wounded to the hospital in his vehicle? For the GOC to use the word, "What assistance I could lend," has said it all.

In 3MCDO, it was the duty of the QMG (Quartermaster General) at the Divisional HQ (Ammunition Department) who would, in all cases, not in most cases, be responsible for ammunition being sent to the forward troops through their sector or brigade or battalion headquarters. These units

have ammunition holdings. I can't imagine Gen. Franz Haider, Chief of the German Army general staff issuing ammunition to General Erwin Rommel during WW II, General Omar Bradley issuing ammunition to an outpost. But the new GOC 3MCDO left the battle front where our troops were allegedly losing ground and taking casualties, to go and authorise ammunition from 150 kilometres away to show how untrue this story was. The outposts have been a part of a company or battalion or a brigade and infact a sector since Akinrinade and Ola Oni were there. For the enemy to defeat the outpost that would have been a battallion or a sector attack. Those attacking enemy would not have attacked an outpost and got away with it as described in Obasanjo's book. That again is another fallacy.

During World War II, Gen. Patton of USA Army was relieved of his appointment for slapping a shell-shocked soldier in Sicily en route Messina in August, 1943. But we killed ours without trial. What message did we send to his family? I guess he was another unknown soldier. There was radio to be used and the ammunition would have been brought to the outpost from battalion, brigade, and from the sector HQ, even before involving 3MCDO HQ. That is called the use of initiative in the infantry. Radio was the right thing to use to save time. The ammunition would have been brought from the immediate HQ of the so-called outpost. The GOC did not know that, and so left Akinrinade and the other officers laughing when he told them that he was going to look for ammunition and help. In all my military training at home and abroad, I never heard a private soldier use the word 'Help' or assistance to describe a military situation, let alone an officer or a General Officer Commanding for that matter.

The ADC was Col. Obasanjo's nearest security that ran away from the battlefield and was sacked at once. The soldier who was shot had not gone to the battlefield yet.

However, everybody heard stories in Lagos and across the country that Col. Benjamin Adekunle was killing his troops. But here is a hero's story of bravery. Let me tell a story in Nigeria of another fake trial that never took place. In 1977, there was a gazette published when Obasanjo was head of state about me. My son, in the law school in the UK, Olatokunbo, found this document somehow, while Obasanjo and Danjumas staff in Lagos also brought me some more documents on this subject. It was the Official Government of Nigeria Gazette purported that Brig. General Alabi-Isama was tried by a court martial and was found guilty of offences related to public property.

After all, the military has a court martial procedure. What happened to that procedure? This is part of the tragedy of our nation, where, after a war of unity, we have not been able to put leaders in place who will think about our people, their welfare and their security. We have analysed sadists most of whose preoccupation is thinking about themselves alone and hence looting the treasury. What makes a leader or a military general is not strategy, tactics or their dishonest and ill-gotten wealth, but their vision.

What a pity. No wonder during Chief Abiola's June 12 issue in Nigeria, Gen. Obasanjo then said that Chief Abiola was not the messiah that we were looking for, so he came to Nigeria from New York and left his wife Stella Obasanjo behind. She got my telephone number somehow and called to see if she could come to see me in Houston Texas where I was based. Well, because my wife is also from Ishan (now Edo State) and because of my friendship with her father and the Abebe family and the fact that she knew me well before her marriage to Gen. Obasanjo, I was pleased and I encouraged her to come. She came along with four other security officials and friends including Viviane Gakuba. I picked her up at the Houston International Airport with her

entourage to my house at 2402 Greek Hickory Road in Bammel Forest, Houston Texas, USA.

“Wow,” she said. “You live here.” I answered that I did not just live there that I owned the house. The house is on one acre with five bedrooms, Island Kitchen, formal and breakfast dining, with three cars garage and swimming pool; a limousine and a 560SEC sports Mercedes Benz to go with it and a Ford Probe. She was surprised, but why the surprise? Then she said, “You have arrived,” but I did not go anywhere. She was surprised only because they were waiting to see a dejected pauper begging for bread. Not a chance! Most people forget that those who created yesterday’s pains, do not control tomorrow’s potentials, do they? Mrs Stella Obasanjo saw the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living and confirmed that she was in Houston Texas with me with the consent of her husband.



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Ministry of Establishments	Aiyemhosi, Miss M.	Clerical Officer	.. Stenographer	..	24-9-76
	Oyemiran, Miss A. O.	Clerical Officer	.. Stenographer	..	11-3-77
	Quadri, Miss O. A.	Typist, Grade II	.. Stenographer	..	11-3-77
	Satiyo, Miss F.	Clerical Officer	.. Stenographer	..	24-9-76
LEFT THE SERVICE					
Department	Name	Appointment	Date of leaving Service		Reason for leaving Service
Ministry of Communications	Ehiemye, S. A.	.. Senior Plant Officer	..	19-12-77	Retired
Ministry of Economic Development and Reconstruction	Oke, Mrs A. E.	.. Senior Typist	..	1-8-77	Resigned
Ministry of Establishments	Zinsou, J. P. M.	.. Assistant Executive Officer (General Duties)	..	24-9-76	Withdrew
Ministry of Information	Ofurebi, Miss A.	.. Clerical Officer	..	12-10-77	Resigned
Ministry of Internal Affairs	Chukwu, O. I.	.. Typist, Grade II	..	1-12-76	Resigned
Ministry of Labour	Okonkwo, M. C.	.. Typist, Grade III	..	13-6-77	Resigned
	Ovianu, O.	.. Clerical Officer	..	20-9-76	Resigned
Ministry of Works	Amangbo, Miss F.	.. Technical Assistant	..	18-10-77	Resigned

Government Notice No. 1191

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE—NIGERIAN ARMY

DISCIPLINE—OFFICERS

The following details are notified for general information :

Brigadier G. A. Isaacs (N/142)	.. Tried by Court Martial and found guilty of offences related to public property.
Punishment : Dismissed from the Nigerian Army with effect from 18th October, 1977.	
Colonel A. Tijani (N/344)	.. Tried by Court Martial and found guilty of offences related to public property.
Punishment : Dismissed from the Nigerian Army with effect from 18th October, 1977.	

E. A. Ovworon,
for : Permanent Secretary,
Ministry of Defence

Lagos, DATED this 5th day of December, 1977.

Obasanjo led Federal Republic of Nigeria Government lied against me in this official government gazette. SHAMEFUL isn't it?

- But where did the court martial take place?
- At what address, in what court, which house or in whose office did the court martial sit?
- Who was the President (Judge) of the court martial?
- What was his rank in the army? Or in the armed forces?
- Where are the originating summons and where is the report?
- Was money lost?
- Was money stolen?

My Command Page 78, para. 2.

By the end of May Capt Gbadamosi King had taken over the Command of the Air Force detachment from Maj. Ato. I had known earlier both Gbadamosi and his friend Jebak who died during the war in an air crash near Ife in the Western State. The two were dare-devil pilots and go-getters, confident and intrepid. They brought me from Maiduguri on 28 July 1966. I had gone to Maiduguri on 28 July 1966 to look for a suitable barrack area to accommodate soldiers intended to be stationed there as a result of the earlier May riots in the North.

Comments

During the week after the January 15th, 1966 coup, Major Olusegun Obasanjo, as he then was, who (in part because he was outside the country) was not part of Major Nzeogwu's original coup team nevertheless found a way to represent Nzeogwu in Lagos in negotiations with Maj-Gen. Aguiyi-Ironsi. There was tension between Nzeogwu and Ojukwu over Ojukwu's arrest of Captain Christian Ude who had gone to Kano to get money from the Central Bank on behalf of Nzeogwu. After this, as behind the scene negotiations between senior officers went on, the Nigerian Air Force flew Obasanjo to Kano but by the order of Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, Lt. Ike Nwachukwu detained him and the air force plane at Kano Airport. Major Obasanjo was later released to continue playing his role while Nzeogwu himself was subsequently escorted to Lagos by Col. Conrad Nwawo. Eventually, Obasanjo was not arrested in Lagos as part of Nzeogwu's coup plotters, or an accessory to it, but there were some observers who interpreted his actions on behalf of Nzeogwu as proof of association and guilt (whether true or not).

Therefore, by the time of the July 1966 counter-coup, Obasanjo was still in the North in Kaduna, the counter-coup plotters wanted to kill him. But Governor Hassan Katsina and Lt. Col. Abba Kyari arranged for him to be flown out of Kaduna to a safe place further north-east. Just as 4th Battalion troops were looking for me for (a) not leading them in Ibadan against the Ibos that had wronged me since I

refused to return to Ibadan during my leave in January 1966 from Kaduna; and (b) for arranging for surviving Ibos from NMTC to leave Kaduna by train in August. That was how Obasanjo was also sought after for associating (in their view) with Nzeogwu's coup one way or another. Col. Shuwa was the battalion commander in Kano after Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu was appointed governor of the Eastern Region, and it would ordinarily have been Col. Shuwa's duty to look for barracks for his troops after the May riots, not that of Obasanjo.

My Command Page 79, para. 1.

Within a week, he redeemed his promise when, in the evening of 5 June 1969 he brought down a rebel cargo aircraft illegally overflying Nigerian airspace. Gbadamosi had been tipped off by his headquarters in Lagos. He took off in his MIG 17 looking for the aircraft knowing its bearing, speed and estimated time of departure from Sao Tome. After searching the air for a while, getting low on fuel, Gbadamosi decided to make a last search before nightfall and before returning to base when he sighted the ill-fated aircraft. He called on the pilot to land in Port Harcourt or Calabar but the pilot ignored the call. Gbadamosi issued the final warning and the final call but the pilot remained unyielding. Gbadamosi followed the aircraft and brought it down near Eket. A few bursts of the cannon downed the aircraft in a mighty cloud of explosion. The wreckage was strewn over a large area. Later, the International Red Cross claimed ownership of the aircraft amongst the wreckage of which was found non - relief military hardware. The Red Cross could neither justify flying outside the agreed corridor nor the failure to respond to warning call and request to land in Calabar or Port Harcourt or the contents of their aircraft.

Comments

The operation to shoot down the Swedish Red Cross cargo plane was part of the evolving strategy to attack Biafra's centre of gravity. It was during Adekunle's time at 3MCDO that it was initially conceptualised although it did not take place until June 5, about three weeks after the change of command. Gbadamosi's HQ in Lagos did not tip them off for this operation. As discussed in part 2 of this book, it was Akinrinade and I that alerted the NAF. Relief flights from various directions into Biafra at that time originated from

Fernando Po, Libreville, Abidjan and Sao Tome. In the absence of comprehensive radar coverage or satellites, we relied on painstaking direct visualisation by bush smoke signal and our 3MCDO spies on the ground at Fernando Po and Eket, to map the flight route and timing over Eket. Akinrinade and I were at Eket for one full week for this operation.



Bush Signal for the Air Force

Page 79, para. 2.

The effect of the singular achievement of the air force especially on 3 Marine Commando Division was profound. It raised the morale of all service personnel, especially of the Air Force detachment concerned and the troops they supported - gun-runners and relief runners alike. For many nights there were no flights of any-sort into Biafra.

Comments

This 'stress test' was yet another clear sign that Uli-Ihiala was Biafra's centre of gravity. Since Biafra's cargo flights were afraid to fly into Uli-Ihiala with supplies, including ammunition and weapons, therefore there was panic in their ranks. On one hand, the revelation that the aircraft was carrying weapons caused tension between the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the federal government; on the other, it resulted in a new agreement with the ICRC for daytime flights which Biafra rejected

immediately. Shortly thereafter, the World Council of Churches (WCC) began reviewing its own role in relief supplies.

My Command Page 79, para. 3.

The following day 6 June, I visited 3 Sector under the Command of Lt- Col Alabi - Isama with its headquarters in Uyo. The Sector covered the area from Azumini to Cross River. The Sector Commander, a flamboyant character, was by any standards a very intelligent man and would have been one of the best officers the Nigerian Army had ever produced if he had applied his intelligence and ability fully to productive and positive action in the Army. He met me at Azumini, the base of 12 Brigade Headquarters under the command of Capt. Atama, later coming under the command of Capt. Mac Isemade, a very smart and confident officer. I visited all the forward locations of the Brigade. It was a very hotly contested fluid front where there was constant fighting and exchange of positions almost on a daily basis.

Comments

I am uncomfortable doing this but, again, for posterity let me make it clear that:

- As a sportsman, there was no unit that I commanded that did not win army sports events.
- I was tactics instructor at NMS and at NMTC.
- As an officer, war planner, tactician, a military strategist, and commander, this book will show some of my actions. I was the commander of troops that captured Ugep, Obubra, Obang, Ekang, Uyo, Itu, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Oron, Etman, Eket, Opobo, Bori, Aletu-Elеме, Elelenwa and Port Harcourt. Where did he capture in the civil war? In which attack did he feature? I was not a coward. I did not go looking for ammunition or help when my troops were under attack. Neither did I run away from the war front because Biafran troops had seen me. Col. Obasanjo does not know who is called Alabi-Isama from Asaba to Port Harcourt, Biafran troops know. I was raised to be excellent and to believe that people are one's greatest

asset and must not be destroyed but revered even though among every twelve, there is always a Judas.

For example, in 1960 as a cadet in England, an Australian cadet called Harvey took me for a week-end trip to London. He was my very good friend. He was David Bamigboye's friend also and loved eating my 'Nigerian Pudding' which was gari and sugar sent to me at school while in UK, by my mother. Anytime we went out, we had to return to base either on Sunday night or early Monday morning not later than parade time at 8.00a.m.

The train ride from London to Mons Officer Cadet School in Aldershot was available every hour. Therefore, we had to catch the 6.00a.m. train to arrive at school at 7.00a.m. and still had one hour to prepare for parade. On one occasion, we were at the train station at 5.30a.m. for a 6.00a.m. train ride as planned. We were seated in the train when Harvey's girl friend wanted a kiss and to talk some more and so Cadet Harvey jumped down from the train in which we were seated, for a kiss and to make small talk.

The train started moving at exactly 6.00a.m. I jumped down and dragged Harvey away so we would not miss the last train. I thought it was one of those Nigerian trains that would have taken at least fifteen minutes to gather speed and I thought we could catch the train, but I was wrong. The train gathered speed in just one second and when I tried to catch the train, it just threw me back. Harvey did not even try to catch the train. So, we missed the train that would have taken us to school on time. Instead, we caught the 7.00a.m. train and there I was crying for getting late to school for no reason other than the fact that Harvey was kissing his girl friend.

I knew I was in trouble and could be sent back to Nigeria for acts prejudicial to good order and military discipline for

coming late on parade. When we got to school, we were marched before the commandant for coming late, and Harvey was first to be asked why he was late. He told the truth about his girl friend asking for one last kiss. I literally wetted my pants, because I had thought of some fib other than Harvey kissing his girl friend. Whom would I tell the story back in Nigeria that I failed to graduate from cadet school in England because of another man kissing his girl friend? But when he was asked by the commandant what Alabi had to do with it, he said that I noticed that the train was moving and I jumped down to alert him and to drag him into the train, but that the train was too fast for us and it knocked us down. The cadet school commandant took a good look at me. I thought that he was going to pronounce my punishment. Instead he said, "Alabi, well done, you saw a friend in trouble and you offered to help at your own risk. You sure have leadership quality." You will not leave your men in the lurch when in trouble". Harvey lost three week-ends to extra duty while I was commended for leadership quality. It is important for leaders to have leadership qualities, even if they got there by fluke, crook or destiny. Justice and equity are part of what we need in our country from any leader.

My mother told me not to kill without reason in the war front. After a long argument with her on this issue, I finally understood how important it was to help people and not try to destroy them. She went further to say that if the war was to keep Nigeria one, the people that we are fighting against must be made to want to be a Nigerian not by killing them. So, she bought five horse whips and distributed them to five of us: Adekunle, Ayo Ariyo, Akinrinade, Abubakar, and one for me too and told us not to carry weapons and not to kill whoever looked at us in the face eye to eye. That is the story behind 3MCDO officers' canes. Then I asked a question which I had asked before I realised how dumb that was. I

asked if we should strike the troops with the cane. My mother flared up. She shouted at the top of her voice and made me to realise, should I not otherwise know, that these troops were not fighting for me, and that they were fighting with me. As the officer, I must show leadership, and that laying my hands on any of them was an assault. She continued that I must protect them by all means as I was their commander and their parents even if many of them were older than myself. I just went quiet. Therefore, looking after the welfare and life of my troops, I learnt not only from my military training but from my mother as well. We started calling her, "Commando mama". There was no contest at Azumini. That was where I allowed Biafran troops to escape from the gap I created and that was where I captured 300 Biafran troops and their commander. It was also where he (Obasanjo) ran away from during the attack.

My Command Page 79, para. 3.

The front of the brigade was wide, extending from Ogbor Hill on the left to the outskirts of Ikot- Ekpene on the right. As I came to know later, it was the most rebel-infiltrated brigade within the Division. Before I departed from the brigades, the rebels mounted a heavy attack probably hoping to catch me unawares while I was still inspecting the defensive line of the Brigade.

Comments

- When Obasanjo announced his visit to Sector 3, which was my sector, with my HQ at Uyo, I told him that we had planned an attack for that day to keep Akinrinade's right flank safe from Biafran troops infiltration through Azumini River, and the gap I opened for them to escape from — See Scorpion Strategy map of 5 pronged-attack on Port Harcourt page 245. He arrived at 5.00p.m although my attack was planned for 9.00p.m. the same night.

- a. There was no way he could have visited my front lines when we were getting ready for an attack at 9.00p.m. - to see what?
- b. His middle jacket button snapped and he was looking scruffy. But I had needle and thread and an extra button in my 'housewife' and my orderly fixed it for him. He commented that it was good that I had my 'housewife' with me. That showed how organised 3MCDO was. The problem of 3MCDO was Sector 1, along Port Harcourt-Owerri road. But not only that, he did not know what to do. His ego would not let him listen to the advice of his more experienced but junior officers until he had gotten so many wounded and killed. When Obasanjo promised to wait and see the attack at 9.00p.m., I was pleased. I showed him the plan and explained why the attack was necessary. As the bombing and shelling started at 8.45p.m., and the attack started at 9.00p.m. exactly, we started gaining ground and advancing. It was dark, but the artillery shelling and tracer firing from our Panhard scout car gave some light and showed the direction of advance. My men knew what to do and where we were going. After about two hours into the advance, we had reached the main Aba-Ikot Ekpene road at Ikot-Ineme, and I wanted to tell the GOC about the progress and where we were. It was already about 11.00p.m. When I looked for Obasanjo and Innih, they were nowhere to be found. We had captured Ikot-Ineme and linked up with my troops from my right flank advancing from Uwa on Ikot Ekpene-Aba road, led by Capts. Musa Wamba and Olatubosun.

When I radioed Port Harcourt to report that I could not find the commander and George Innih, they reported that

they had arrived Port Harcourt at 10.30 p.m. This meant that they left almost immediately the battle started at 9.00p.m. So, no one would have known that he was there as to want to catch him. It was at night and not a daylight attack. We mounted the attack not the rebels. That had always been George Innih's language. "Somebody seeing him and wanting to catch him, or going back to look for ammunition when there is an attack." When he left my battle front, he did not bother to tell me. That was what Adekunle would have called 'Cowardice' in front of the enemy. By 9.00p.m., the commander had disappeared. Not even my own troops knew where he was. The picture on page 80 of Obasanjo's book, *My Command* is of Lt. Col. Obeya briefing him and Col. (Father) Pedro Martins at 18 Brigade HQ at Itu, not 13 Brigade Commander at Ikot Ekpene. The entire story on pages 79 and 80 of the book, *My Command* is inaccurate. Just imagine General George Patton of the USA Army during WWII, leaving the front line because a Nazi saw him and wanted to catch him. It is the same pattern of escape when he ran away from an outpost to look for ammunition and assistance at Port Harcourt.

***My Command* Pages 80, para. 1.**

I saw 37 Battalion in action on the Azumini-Aba road. I observed the battle at very close quarters and was delighted to see our soldiers taking over rebel trenches and capturing some equipment. No prisoners of war were captured by our troops on this occasion, and I emphasized to them the importance of prisoners of war for obtaining information about the rebels through interrogation. On the whole our troops lost more ground than they gained but worse than that they suffered heavy casualties.

The pattern became so regular whenever I visited the brigade that the troops of the brigade made a special appeal to me through their commander not to visit them again in their trenches in their forward locations. They requested me to visit their Brigade headquarters only and they promised to do their best always. Before I departed from the brigade on that first visit, I received a good briefing from the Brigade Commander who described the difficulty of the task given to him especially with inadequate equipment, materials and men. He did not hide his disappointment and his disgust.

Pages 81, para. 2.

From Azumini we moved to Ikot Ekpene, the headquarter of 13 Brigade. This brigade was sub-divided into two battle groups, I and II, because of the peculiarity of the terrain, the threat of imminent attack and for ease of command and control. Lt. Gagara, a fine field commissioned officer who commanded No 1 group died in action just before the end of the war. I was very much impressed by his understanding of the situation, his lucid explanation, his firm control over his men and his organisational ability in spite of his educational handicap.

Comments

Col. Obasanjo did not see any attack in Sector 3 where I was the commander. I never lost ground and that sector happened to have been the most feared sector to attack by Biafran troops. The planned attack was at night. He saw nothing because he had escaped to Port Harcourt. This was the sector where I had earlier captured 300 Biafran troops and their officers, including Captain Ibok, their commander, when I closed the gap between Uwa and Ikot-Ineme on Aba Ikot Ekpene road. Azumini was also a killing ground. We re-kitted them and put them back into 3MCDO, and they performed creditably. Obasanjo did not see me fight but must have heard of Asaba, Calabar-Port Harcourt advance and the recapture of Ikot Ekpene where I was the commander. I did not see him fight anywhere but I heard of Ohoba, the outpost in Sector 2 when he went to look for help and ammunition. I also know that he escaped from Azumini and got lost en route Amichi on the day of the final battle for Uli-Ihiala.

The HQ of 13 Brigade was not at Ikot Ekpene. Major Sunny Tuoyo was the first commander of 13 Brigade with a scorpion as their insignia. The brigade had always been based at Uyo from April 17th, 1968 until the start of 'Operation Pincer 2/ in January 1970.

- The idea of a battle group in Sector 3, was original to 13 Brigade and not in any army pamphlet, just as the

"Sectors" followed corridors between the numerous rivers of the area. Battle Group 1 was to face Arochukwu in support of 18 Brigade that was based there since April 18th, 1968. Lt. Gagara, a field commissioned officer, was the commander.

- While Lt. Gagara's name was mentioned under Battle Group I, Capt. Olatunbosun, an Egbaman from Abeokuta was holding Ikot Ekpene up to Uwa and Azumini. He was the commander of Battle Group 2 that led the attack to Azumini and I also introduced him to Obasanjo before the attack. But he was never mentioned because he was not Gagara; or may be because Yoruba people were too many in 3MCDO Division or too many of their names had already been mentioned in Battle group in 13 Brigade of 3MCDO meant a self-sufficient unit in all respects that can operate independently of its HQ for at least 30 days. Gagara and many more died on the way to Arochukwu only a week to the end of the civil war because Obasanjo gave 13 brigade illegitimate orders to go the wrong way to Archukwu instead of Uli-Ihiala.

Pages 81, para. 2.

From Ikot Ekpene we moved to ITU where 18 Brigade was based under the command of Maj. Tuoyo. Outside Calabar Sector, 18 Brigade was then the most quiet and least active in terms of combat. The Brigade Commander felt slightly cut off from the rest of the Division. I visited two of the battalion locations and not a sound was heard - a far cry from the other fronts where the rebels always opened fire on us. I talked to the troops in their trenches.

Comments

18 Brigade at Itu was then the most quiet and least active in terms of combat. Yes. That was why we advised, that instead of attacking Ohoba on May 20th 1969, with the same troops that were beleaguered for seven months inside Owerri, we suggested the reorganisation in such a way that the 16 Brigade should move out to Itu or Calabar, while the troops

of 18 Brigade at Itu should replace 16 Brigade on Owerri front. They were well trained and led by a very seasoned and experienced officer, Lt. Col. Ignatius Obeya. He had 2,500 troops that had seen action from Calabar to Itu across Uwet valley and Oban hills. However, because the suggestions came from Alabi-Isama, Obasanjo chose not to accept them and launched the remnants of the 16 Brigade into battle at Ohoba and got them killed for no reason other than 'incompetence'. The Biafran troops had the opportunity to give a good account of themselves at Ohoba.

Pages 81, para. 3.

From Itu we went to Uyo, the Sector Headquarters, which was most impressively located in the old city council office. I received a masterly briefing from the Sector Commander and his staff and I addressed the officers before I returned to Port Harcourt late in the night. Although I was not satisfied with the situation on ground in the sector, I observed that both officers and men showed understanding and willingness to succeed when I spoke with them whether in their messes, headquarters, on parade ground or in their trenches.

Comments

When Col. Obasanjo visited my HQ at Uyo, he never went to the forward trenches. Maybe he did that in the other units that he visited, but definitely not in mine. This was just an exaggeration. Col. Obasanjo did not address my troops and we had no officer's mess in Sector 3, where I was the commander; neither did we have a parade ground. My men were in trenches and the administrative staff at the rear were cooks, military police, medical staff and HQ staff keeping records of the dead and wounded. Obasanjo found it convenient to refer to me as sector commander while naming the others in his book. Mentioning my name gave him a fright and guilty conscience perhaps.

Pages 81, para. 4.

Calabar was the last Sector to be visited. The Sector Commander, Lt. Col Ayo Ariyo, who had shown great fighting spirit in operations leading to the

capture of Opobo and Port Harcourt, had lost interest in the war. He had been passed over for promotion and his main interests at that point appeared to be economic. He had allegedly purchased attractive items on the war fronts and shipped them through naval ships to Lagos.

Comments

Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo was not passed over for promotion. He lost interest in the war after Adekunle's outburst about having too many Yoruba at his 3MCDO HQ following the capture of Port Harcourt. Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo was the point unit that led us into Port Harcourt. He was the first to hug and congratulate me after the capture of Port Harcourt on May 18th, 1968. In 3MCDO, our prayers were to get out of the war alive. We did not think of promotions. A living captain is better than a dead general.

I am sure that the navy commanders who were based at Calabar can confirm whether or not Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo bought attractive items from the war front and shipped to Lagos through them. Well, Col. Ayo Ariyo is late and unable to defend himself but I know for sure, that such things might have been possible elsewhere but definitely not in 3MCDO and not the Ayo Ariyo that I knew. However, he has gone to answer the call of his Maker, a call which we will all answer to one day especially now that we are over 70 years old. What I know for sure is that Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo personally looked after Obasanjo during his visit to his Sector 4 in Calabar.

That sector stretched from Obubra in the north-east to Calabar. Major Kunle Elegbede was his deputy and they were always on the road as they had to patrol the Cameroon border with Nigeria from Calabar through Oban, Ehang and Ikom to Obubra everyday as part of Operation Pincer 2, in order to avoid the Biafran troops infiltration into the area to attack Calabar, and to block Biafra by road to Cameroon and from the outside world by road.

Similar to what General Scipio Africanus, the Roman General did to defeat Hannibal in the battle for Carthage in 206 BC, Sector 4 was the most important and sensitive sector of the entire 3MCDO battle front. Calabar /Oron axis was our centre of gravity in 3MCDO. Thank God the Biafrans did not know that, to take advantage of it. Just as the Nazi Germany did not appreciate the importance of Malta on the Mediterranean in Operation Hercules in 1941-1942 World War II, so Biafra did not recognise the importance of Oron to 3MCDO operations. They were busy planning to capture Calabar and Port Harcourt and Owerri. Obasanjo did not go to Obubra, but ate and drank with Ayo Ariyo only to write this untruth about him. We had no officers mess anywhere in 3MCDO.

Pages 81, para. 4.

He explained to me later that what he saw of the style of living of officers in Lagos during Gowon's marriage killed any fighting spirit left in him. To rekindle his interest in the war as a fighting soldier, it would have been necessary to bring Lt. Col. Ariyo into the mainstream of active operations in Port Harcourt. He gave me complex medical reasons for remaining in Calabar and reporting at Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) once a month.

Comments

Ayo Ariyo never reported any ailment to me as Chief of Staff of 3MCDO Division. He was hale and hearty throughout our Calabar to Port Harcourt advance. He never went to Lagos from the war front not for one day throughout the war. How then did he see the style of living of officers in Lagos during Gowon's marriage? He was not a guest at the marriage and he never visited Lagos.

This must have been in Obasanjo's imagination because if he did, he would have had to inform me accordingly, and it was Lt. Col. Ariyo that held the 3 MCDO together at that time because it was the week of Adekunle's failed ambush of Akinrinade and I. Before then, aside Adekunle, I did not

know any officer of 3MCDO that officially travelled to Lagos and left their troops behind in the trenches - definitely not Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo. Major Innih that went to brief Obasanjo in Lagos ran away from his troops. Innih's action is called absence without leave (AWOL) and it is a very serious offence in the military.



Col. Obasanjo ate Ayo Ariyo's food at Calabar and I know that he (Ariyo) went out of his way to look after him. Did you notice that we had no dining table and other essentials? Could we not have looted these essentials? Obasanjo enjoyed his meal and cracked the chicken bone. We had no officer's mess in 3MCDO war zone.

My Command Page 82, Para. 2.

Within the first month of my arrival in Port Harcourt, I had visited all battalions of the Division, met almost all the officers and had experienced, at first hand, the problems and difficulties of officers and men of the Division. I needed to digest all this and to work out, in detail, a policy programme and organization that would bring about improvement in the welfare of troops generally in addition to payment of full salary to all soldiers, which should lead to success in the battlefield. My observation of the problems and difficulties tallied with the briefings I had received emphasizing the importance of human welfare and of proper administration and operation in the field.

Comments

Despite all advice against paying full salary to troops in the war front, Obasanjo went ahead and ordered that full salary be paid to all troops. We reminded him that we were not in the barracks, but in the war front. However, when it comes to the word, 'money', decisions were not difficult for some leaders to take, and all eyes and ears were usually wide open. Col. Obasanjo was in the Congo. Were troops paid full salaries? We needed 30 days only to end the war, Obasanjo had wasted five months already on trivials.

Page 82, Para. 3.

The war has been going on for twenty two months before I arrived in Port Harcourt and some of the soldiers of 3 Marine Commando Division had been fighting without any organized rest for upward of twenty months. Soldiers then came to believe that the only way to secure any rest at all was to become a casualty hence they set out to inflict injuries on themselves so that they could be evacuated to Port Harcourt, Calabar or Lagos. They had so perfected this unmilitary act that it seriously affected the operational capability of the Division. Within the first month, I had almost as many casualties as I had reinforcements and more than fifty per cent of my casualties were self-inflicted.

Comments

If a soldier had not had an organised rest for about 20 months, then his 20 months' salary would have been in his pocket only because he was still alive. What would have happened to the salary of those that were dead? Only the commander could tell but he made no reference to that. What a point to make by this commander who talked about rest for his troops in one breath while launching tired, battle wearied and fatigued lots into battle at Ohoba, and got them all killed. The soldier rather than fight resulted to self-inflicted wounds. This was at Ohoba front which was Sector 1 only.

Page 82, Para. 4.

The active encouragement which officers gave soldiers of their own ethnic group to desert the war front so as to obtain rest and relief was one of the

serious causes of indiscipline within the Division. The lack of confidence and esprit de corps within the officer corps which was permeating the rank and the file did not help matters. Col. Godwin Ally told me within the first few days of my arrival that when some fellow senior officers visited him in his house uninvited, his orderlies went to take away their weapons in case those officers wanted to be 'funny'. After the officers had left, the orderlies told Ally of their readiness to defend him against his fellow officers. He, nonetheless, chastised them for their action.

Comments

How ethnicity came to be mentioned in 3MCDO Division is evil. We advanced for 30 days to Obubra from Calabar and from Calabar to Port Harcourt for another 30 days, and not one officer or soldier that I knew thought of the other as Yoruba, Hausa, Efik or Ibibio. Let us for a minute think that this point here was true. That meant, for instance, that Akinrinade at Sector 2 would tell all Yoruba to go on leave when he needed more men at Aba front; or would Ayo Ariyo tell all the Yoruba in his sector to go on leave when he had to patrol such a large area in his sector to avoid Biafran infiltration into the capital city of South-eastern State - Calabar?

- Lt. Col. Godwin Ally, about whom Obasanjo wrote as having laissez-faire attitude to work and feeling recentful having been bypassed for promotion, told Obasanjo, according to Obasanjo's story in his book, that senior officers' weapons were taken away when Godwin Ally's place was visited by uninvited senior officers. Well, from where were the senior officers?
- Sector 2, commanded by Akinrinade was the nearest to Godwin Ally's Sector 1 at Ohoba. Could Akinrinade have visited Ohoba, about three hours drive to and from Asa which was Akinrinade's HQ at that time - and leave his troops in the trenches to visit Ally? To do what?
- Sector 3, about 300 kilometres away across enemy lines, was commanded by Alabi-Isama. For what reason would I visit Godwin Ally at Ohoba? He was not my close friend.

He was my senior. As a matter of fact, when Ikot Ekpene was recaptured by 13 Brigade and I became the sector commander, Godwin Ally travelled all the way from Ohoba to attend my victory party with international observers in 1969. So, which Godwin Ally was Obasanjo talking about?



Godwin Ally dancing at my Uyo party

- Or would Ayo Ariyo from Calabar, about 350 kilometres away, drive to Godwin Ally at Ohoba? For what would he leave his troops in the trenches to visit Ally? So, who were these visitors? These people had started to see ghosts already after Biafra's fire power was unleashed against them at Ohoba.

We all held horse whips which my mother bought for us. They were five in number, held throughout the war by Adekunle, Ayo Ariyo, Alabi-Isama, Akinrinade and Lt. Col. Abubakar. So, which senior officers visited Godwin Ally that had to be humiliated by a security guard at the door by removing their weapons and my escort would

not have levelled the place? Obasanjo was just filling space in his book. Senior officers had escorts, would their escorts just stand there and watch an orderly of any officer humiliating their boss? Obasanjo claimed he went round all the 3MCDO operational areas within 30 days of his arrival in Port Harcourt to take command of the formation, but did he see soldiers of Sector 2 commanded by Akinrinade, or Sector 3 commanded by Alabi-Isama, or Sector 4 commanded by Ayo Ariyo with self-inflicted wounds? This phenomenon started when he (Obasanjo) ordered 16 Brigade troops, the 500 men that survived the siege at Owerri, who had been beleaguered for seven months without adequate food and water to go back and attack Ohoba from where they managed to break out. The soldiers would rather die than go back and most of those who went back to attack Ohoba never came back alive, so troops started to desert from Sector 1. It was at this stage Obasanjo thought that he should listen to the voice of reason from the more experienced officers. The troops of Sector 1 deserted in hundreds which made him pause and ordered an urgent meeting of all commanders. He was really mastering the job.

My Command Page 83, para. 1.

The existence of commando girls and the use made of them were another source of indiscipline in the Division. The girls were recruited as soldiers, given Army numbers and put in uniform but most of them were more useful for social functions than for Army duties. As was to be expected, although they belonged to other ranks, they soon were on familiar terms with the officers and could not be disciplined by male senior NCOs. I was told of an event that took place before I took over the Division. A male sergeant in an office wanted a commando girl who was a private to carry out a duty and the girl blatantly disobeyed. The sergeant ordered the girl into the guard room as is normal with the military. The girl assured him that she would not be there for ten minutes as Maj. A (calling the officer by his first name) would see to that. The major indeed did see to it and the commando girl was in the guard room for exactly seven minutes. She did not return to the office for days after she washed it all off in the major's house!

Comments

Parents in the Calabar area never had any good impression of the army before the war because it was the job for the lower classes of people they called 'Godogodo'. But when the war got to their doorsteps, they allowed their sons and daughters to join the army to assist in the war effort for the unity of the country. Here we are calling their daughters names, and asserting that their honour had been violated by the so-called 'Godogodos'. These so-called 'commando women' saved lives and that was the most important part of their calling; a duty they performed creditably for which many were wounded, maimed and also died. To me, they were among the unsung heroes of the Nigeria-Biafra war. May God bless all mothers.

A lousy story that a sergeant ordered the girl into the guardroom was not a normal system of discipline in the military. The girl was not under the sergeant's command. So, who found her guilty, and of what offence was she put in the guardroom? My GOC had time for all these and troops were dying in the war front. When Obasanjo heard the story, did he order an investigation? Perhaps, the girl was guilty already for being a girl who would not answer the call of a sergeant. Same pattern of punishment of death for the soldier he ordered to be shot or that of Alabi-Isama with a fake federal government gazette on court-martial. We did not have enough troops to fight but we sent some to guardroom. We had no officers mess but we had guardroom. Where was the guardroom located. Did the sergeant not have his immediate commander? How did the GOC get involved in these trivials if not for lack of knowing what to do. Was the girl one of the sergeant's staff?

The normal military discipline procedure for the girl was for the sergeant to report the girl to his boss and his (sergeant) boss would report to the girl's boss for discipline,

unless there was an ulterior motive. That is why elders must listen to both sides of a story!



3MCDO Commanders with the horse whips my mother gave to five of us. Right: Lt. Col Ayo Ariyo, and (left), Col. Adekunle and Lt. Col. Alabi-Isama.



Lt. Col. Alani Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama looking at maps for the next operation.



From left, Lt. Col. Abubakar, Abdullahi of the navy, and Captain Ladipo. Officers and men of the armed forces show togetherness in the war front.



From left, Eromobor, Adekunle, and Alabi-Isama looking at the map for routes of escape and bombardment.

I will continue to pay my respect to these girls who are now women, mothers, and grandmothers. They gave their best, their honour and their life for Nigeria, while their mates who did not join the army were getting married, having children and building homes and families. They worked directly with me and I know them well. They were discredited and thrown out with no compensation back to their families. Some of those who are still alive met me while writing this book. Though still bitter about what Nigeria did to them, they are satisfied that we still have one Nigeria, a cause that they fought and many died for.

For those alive, what they have to show for it all was that Nigeria is still one country. Some of them showed me their war wounds, some from bullets. If I was in a position to, I would have investigated the case in question and given honour to whom honour was due. If I know whom you honour, I can describe you. 'Honour thy mother.' When I sat down to reflect on the issue of the 3MCDO ladies and how they were discredited, I then thought on my own that anyone with a dear mother would not discredit the efforts of women.

Page 83, Para. 2.

Another cause of indiscipline was the high level of looting of attractive and durable items by all ranks for sale outside operational areas or for transportation to their homes.

Comments

Obasanjo wrote about looting and transporting loot home. Where was home? In 3MCDO, we had no roads to Lagos, and we had inadequate vehicles for supply of food and ammunition to forward troops let alone have extra to carry loot. What loot are we talking about? This is unfortunate. Firstly, to carry anything to Lagos, one would need a ship or a flight from Calabar and Port Harcourt. Which soldier had access to these? Secondly, Uyo, for instance, was so landlocked that in order to get to the nearest airport or seaport at Calabar or Port Harcourt, which today is only an hour's drive. At that time, during the war, such trips took no less than five hours. Was Obasanjo writing about Nigerian troops of 3MCDO or troops of other divisions of the Nigerian Army with network of roads, rail, and air, who could drive home for the weekend and back? For many in 3MCDO, the day they joined the army was when they last saw their family. Was the looting before Obasanjo took command of 3MCDO, during or after?

Page 83, Para. 2.

The level of indiscipline in the Division in no small measure accounted for the reverses which the Division suffered and the consequent flagging morale, the combination of which nearly marked the Division permanently as a non-effective fighting force.

Comments

What a story! The 3MCDO that liberated two states — the South-eastern State and the Rivers State (in today's four states — Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Rivers states) were ill-disciplined but achieved those feats. Anyway, it was Adekunle that gave room for this comment. Adekunle gave Alabi-Isama his training programme to conform with what he would like to see in 3MCDO. Obasanjo did not do the same when he took over command of the division. If ill-discipline was noticed in the division when he took over, he would have done something about it. He did not. He was busy establishing rest area and payment of full salary to fighting troops in the war front. The morale of sector 1 was the problem not the entire formation.

Page 83, Para. 3.

On the operational side, the tactics adopted in the relatively friendly areas of South - Eastern and Rivers States by the Division were not changed when operating in the more hostile Ibo-speaking areas. The advance was lineal and road-bound. Serious attempt was not made until it was forced on the Division at great cost, to hold ground in the normal conventional defensive fashion. The battle, therefore, became fluid and unsteady and costly in men and material in the see-saw that followed. This also led to an uneven line of defence as evidenced by the rebels presence as close to Port Harcourt as Igrita while 3 Marine Commando troops were as close to Owerri as Umuagu.

Comments

Until Adekunle's OAU, 3MCDO operational boundaries, were along defensible lines within the two liberated states. The casualties Col. Obasanjo was describing here were in Sector 1 only. Once again, I need to reiterate that the Boko Haram

crises in the north-eastern area of Nigeria at the time of going to press with this book could not be described as occurring in all towns of Nigeria. These were problems localised to Sector 1.

Page 83, Para. 3.

The command structure of battalion up to brigade to sector to division was too long, wasteful in men and material with four headquarters levels and each headquarters building up its own image. Most commanders at all levels were too distant from their men.

Comments

In military strategy, there is what is called 'friction', which is the difference between what you planned and the end result of what you got. In army engineering, a normal ruler is always 30.48cm. (12 inches = 1ft) long. Would I be wrong if I made my own ruler 365.76cm (12 feet) long so that it would enable me to measure 18.97 metres (36 feet) in three moves instead of 36 because I was in a hurry? Between time and space in military strategy, time is more important. Outside military pamphlets of war, the rest is left to your initiative and ability to solve problems as you were realistically faced with.

As a matter of fact, in the infantry, you are advised not to try to solve every problem the same way. At Ikot Ekpene, we used the words 'Battle Groups'. During the Calabar to Port Harcourt advance, we used the words 'Sectors and Special Forces' up to Aletu Eleme, and for entry into Port Harcourt, we used 'Brigades.' These were what made 3MCDO special and unique. We innovated and we used initiative. Adekunle, before his initiative and strategic thinking was interfered with in Lagos, had always insisted that we used our initiative to solve problems. In 3MCDO, we never had the best of things and situations, but we made the best use of them all. During the advance from Calabar to Port Harcourt, we had about 36,000 troops which would have been about 18

brigades with about 2,000 troops each. The idea of the word 'Sector' in 3MCDO was strategic, tactical, and operational. We had a sector at Bonny with Akinrinade, at Oron, Isaac Boro had a sector, Ayo-Ariyo had a sector, Shande had a sector and I had a special sector that operated in the Annang province of Uyo, Itu and Ikot Ekpene during the advance.

Altogether, we had five sectors which meant that at any given time, for command and control, I needed to deal with five commanders instead of 18 brigade commanders who would have had to travel long distance across enemy lines for instructions or briefings, or to talk with 18 brigade commanders on the radio. Communications, command and control would have been difficult. We did it our own way and achieved results and nobody complained. By this set-up, we built strong institutions that were independent and sustainable. We did not build the leader. People heard of Adekunle during the advance, only because he was in Lagos doing a public relations type of job while the fighting was going on at the war front by his officers based on the institutions that he built and the orders he gave me to carry out.

Adekunle's fall came about because he broke the institutions he built himself; because he started to think that he was the institution. His long trips to Lagos surely did a lot to destroy him and what he built. Every commander has his own style of commanding, they say. At least we saw Obasanjo's style at Ohoba. To condemn and demolish what others did in order to build yours is what has been one of the tragedies of our nation - so many activities without results, because each new leader spent the better part of his time struggling to discredit his predecessor. I advise that before condemning what others have done, let us find out why it was done or why it happened in the first place.

The new commander, then Col. Obasanjo wrote that most commanders at all levels were too distant from their men. This was not the case with all the four sectors of 3MCDO. This happened only in Sector 1. In Sector 1, Lt. Col. Godwin Ally, the sector commander had his HQ in Port Harcourt, about 150 kilometres away from Owerri where he had his front lines. It took a minimum of five hours journey in a good vehicle because of bad roads. He had to change that after a lot of shouting by me. He had no command post.

In Sector 2, Akinrinade's HQ was at Aba, which was 24 kilometres away. In Sector 3, which was my sector, my tent which was my command post, was at Ikpe junction about 18 kilometres from my front line at Ikot Ekpene and my war room (HQ) was at Uyo 50 kilometres from my front line and 20 kilometres from my command post. In 4 Sector where Ayo Ariyo was the commander, his HQ was in Calabar while his tent was at Odukpani. Adekunle's HQ was in Calabar but his command post was at Akpap and mobile. Col. Obasanjo and Ally had only their HQs in Port Harcourt, with no command post. They never thought of one. When I jocularly asked if I should deliver my write-up to his HQ or command post, he looked lost. He never had any.

Col. Obasanjo's HQ was in Port Harcourt, but his forward troops were attacking Uli-Ihiala for the final battle of Nigeria-Biafra civil war. He had no command post, and he was not there with them. The same approach to command explains why he retreated about 150 kilometres in a four-five hour journey just to get ammunition for a fighting outpost as soon as the battle started. He wrote all these in his book. I am only reacting to his story.

The distance that Obasanjo was talking about was in Sector 1. Why then should he paint the entire 3MCDO Division with the same brush? He just wanted to discredit Adekunle and his achievements. As soon as there was an

attack somewhere he found himself near, Obasanjo would bolt away, all on the pretext that some Biafran soldiers somewhere had seen him and wanted to catch him. If Biafran soldiers heard or knew that Adekunle was in their vicinity, they would opt not to fight and desert that front in seconds. On the other hand, if our troops heard that Adekunle, Alabi-Isama and Akinrinade and Ayo Ariyo were in their unit, their morale would shoot skywards and will want to fight, shouting "Commando!," which was answered, "Black Scorpion!"

But in jungle warfare, it is unusual for one enemy to see the other in battle until contact is made and POWs captured. Well, may be Obasanjo had Rommel and Montgomery during the desert battle of WWII, in mind. May be that was also why 3 Marine Commando Division was later changed to 3 Division and transferred en mass to Jos for Sahel warfare instead of their specialty -amphibious warfare in the riverine areas of the Niger Delta. Was it because somebody somewhere hated and was jealous of Adekunle's successes in the war, and wanted to erase his name permanently? We wondered why he had never been invited to ceremonies or any of the independence celebrations since 1970 till date or why national honour has not been awarded him. This country knows the role Adekunle played in Nigeria-Biafra civil war!

The command structure which sustained 3MCDO for over 24 months in the war front, cannot be flawed by an army engineer. In the book, *My Command*, he wrote that he had planned a reception for the visiting General Adeyinka Adebayo in Port Harcourt. This was on the same day, and at a time the entire division was geared up for the final battle to end the civil war. This only showed that he did not know when Akinrinade moved the troops for the final battle for Uli-Ihiala, when he was fed up.

I am sure that General Adebayo did not arrive Port Harcourt without a previous appointment. Therefore, when did Obasanjo give the order for the attack and on what day and time was the attacking hour which we call 'H' hour in the infantry? With all officers and men waiting for their commander before the final advance, did he tell them to wait until after the party or ordered them to go ahead, presumably to join them later?

Did the GOC (Obasanjo) give the map of operation "Tail Wind" to his coordinator (Akinrinade) for this most important battle to end the civil war? Were the brigade commanders not there? So, what has Akinrinade, a staff officer got to do with the war commander's final battle? Was Akinrinade the commander while the party went on? Command structure in the infantry does not allow that.

The point here is that, the GOC was not there, did not know what to do, and had no plans. In annoyance, Akinrinade pitched the tent for his command post, got the troops together armed with Op. Pincer 2 maps, and attacked Biafra's centre of gravity at Uli-Ihiala. When it was over, and Biafran troops had surrendered in the field, he called Obasanjo to tell him that it was all over. So, Obasanjo went to take pictures at Uli-Ihiala. The war ended with only 4500 troops deployed.



Our vehicles moving in difficult terrain





These are the soldiers described as looters. How will they carry the loot and to where?

Page 83, Para. 3.

Although a substantial amount of money had recently been distributed to officers for welfare, the troops received no benefit from it. The camaraderie that should be built up within each formation was not much in evidence. A feeling that Army Headquarters had neglected the Division had been engendered within the Division and Army Headquarters was disliked and unappreciated.

Comments

Well, I did not know or hear that money had been distributed to officers in 3MCDO Division. May be after I had left. The paymaster in my sector was Capt. Ajala. Thank God he is still alive. He must still be keeping mine. I went looking for Capt. Ajala who is now 80 years old, and I asked about the money for officers he denied distributing any money. This is one project that I must work on next! I advise the federal government to investigate this claim by Obasanjo. 3MCDO officers and men had nothing to do with Lagos unless they were dead or seriously wounded and even then, a flight would have had to be available for the evacuation which was not available as and when needed. We had no telephone to contact anybody, family or loved ones. Letters

were difficult until the governments of South-eastern State and Rivers State were established. Col. Obasanjo arrived on May 16th, 1969 when the entire government administration of these two states and even schools and night clubs had regained normalcy. 3MCDO was never neglected by anybody other than Adekunle who left the division for long trips to Lagos ostensibly to get supplies. After Port Harcourt, Adekunle came back from his long trip to Lagos with nothing but at the same time, he wanted to attack Owerri, Aba and Umuahia - all inside the Ibo heartland. This was to be attained without adequate supplies, rest and regrouping of the tired troops who had been attacking non-stop for 30 days from Calabar to Port Harcourt. Surely Adekunle's mind had been tampered with somehow.

Page 84, Para. 2.

The most defective part of the operational situation within the Division was the absolute lack of reserves at any level of command but especially at the divisional level. The co-operation and co-ordination between Army and Air Force were, to say the least, inadequate. Logistic backing and provisioning were sporadic and unsteady. The myth of debacle and with it had gone the morale and fighting spirit of officers and men.

Comments

We were infantry officers who had liberated two contiguous states from Obubra in the north-east to Degema in the south-west a distance of about 800 kilometres and here was an army engineer commander teaching us to have reserves. When he arrived and ordered the attack of Ohoba on Tuesday May 20th, 1969, where were his reserves which he called Apollo Battalion? Where were they deployed when he could not capture Ohoba? These men were slaughtered during his very first attack. Why did he not deploy his reserve to regain lost ground? When the troops saw this and assessed the type of commander they had, who was himself not in the attack as Adekunle used to be, but whose style had caused even more casualties, they resorted to shooting

themselves and deserting Sector 1. Trouble was at his doorsteps in Sector 1 only, and nowhere else in the division. How could anyone talk about lack of co-operation with the air force, when several joint operations had already been successful before he took over the command of the division? Oron landing was with the navy, the air force and the infantry, first of its kind south of the Sahara in Africa. Also the air force and infantry coordination and cooperation at Uyo Biafra ambush. Perhaps Obasanjo forgot about the first air to air operation in Africa south of the Sahara at Eket when the air force downed Biafra cargo flight. These were operations planned and executed in 3MCDO and by me — Alabi-Isama.

What he was insinuating here was that when he took over the division, the morale and the fighting spirit of the officers and men of 3MCDO as a whole had gone. Obasanjo's aim here was to give the impression that he did it all alone. What a claim! I guess that was why he told troops at Uli-Ihiala to move away for him to take the picture alone. Col. Obasanjo separated the other officers from himself on purpose. Have a look!

The reserves that Col. Obasanjo was talking about here were those from Operation OAU under Adekunle and Obasanjo's own planless attack on Ohoba with 16 Brigade 'rag tag' Owerri survivors. All of these were in Sector 1. What reserve did Obasanjo deploy for his attack on Ohoba? Where was his Apollo Battalion? He never had any, or else why did Apollo Battalion not go on to attack with the remnants of 16 Brigade in reserve?



The GOC (General Officer Commanding) Obasanjo, was not in combat uniform. He was not at the war front when the war ended. He simply came to take the glory, and condemn the other officers and men. "Take my picture alone — You soldiers move out".



The GOC of 3MCDO, Col. Benjamin Adekunle in the centre, and his other commanders who were proud to have him as their leader, until some people tampered with him in Lagos. First left is Lt. Col. Alabi-Isama, his Chief of Staff, next, Lt. Col. Ayo Ariyo. Here, the difference is clear. "Alabi, tell your photographer to take our picture. Come on, take our picture; we did it together", he said.

The troop's relative affluence had made them dread death and run away from fighting. In short, the Division had ceased to be an effective fighting formation.

Comments

Here we are talking about troops' relative affluence which had made them dread death. But we warned him that it was glory-seeking to want to pay full salary to troops in cash in the war front in Nigeria, or anywhere for that matter. Once again, correction exposes character. The same commander who ordered that troops' salaries be paid to them in full in the war front instead of paying to their families at home by allotment is here complaining that there was too much money in their pockets thereby dreading death! Let's consider this for a moment. A soldier, who is lucky not to have been killed for six months, but had six months' salary in his pocket while thinking about his family back home, his children's school fees not paid, his house rent not paid, and his wife and parents begging and borrowing money to survive, is being expected to think of death instead of his family back home. I will advise that in future, the Nigerian Army HQ should have psychiatric tests for future commanders. The idea of paying full salaries to fighting troops in a war setting, and in a situation where currency had been changed between Nigeria and Biafra area, was not thoughtful enough. Obasanjo was really mastering the job.



Chapter VIII of *My Command*

The Reorganisation

***My Command* Page 85, para. 1.**

I appreciated the need for discussions and consultations all round.

Comments

After losing ground at Ohoba with so many casualties and troops deserting in their hundreds, from Sector 1, the new commander then decided to hold a meeting with all officers after five months of complaints and inefficient handling of the entire situation in 3MCDO. That was putting the cart before the horse but the damage had been done already. 3MCDO troops looked for a way to send money to their family back home. They heard that currency had been changed in Nigeria. So our troops started deserting in their hundreds. Words travel faster than the feet. There was nowhere to go. It was chaos everywhere. Then the meeting was summoned at last.

***My Command* Page 85, para. 2.**

So the first administrative instruction I issued was for the payment of full salaries to all soldiers and for brigades to make arrangements for soldiers who wished to save part or all of their salaries.

Comments

But he ordered the payment of full salary to troops in the war front despite advise against it. The same commander

complained that men, due to affluence, started dreading death, yet he was the one who put full salary in their pockets. The result was money everywhere, even in the pockets of dead soldiers.

Page 86, para. 1.

This had tremendous impact on the troops and, as it turned out, the soldiers through their own ingenuity made individual arrangements for sending their money home to their families.

Comments

Unfortunately, Col. Obasanjo did not explain in his book how these ingenious soldiers left their forward trenches in front of Biafran advance towards Port Harcourt in Sector 1, to arrange for money to be sent to their families back home. Through whom and by what method was the money sent? It was an ill considered decision to have paid full salary to troops in the war zone, just because his cadet teacher in 1958 said so. This decision of the commander only shows his style in administration and management though we were taught to appreciate a situation in all respects before taking decisions.

Page 86, para. 3.

By 22 June, I had issued the second general administrative instruction against looting and seizing of property under the guise of genuine purchases from the operational area.

Comments

This made me recall what was called, "Abandoned Property" of the Ibo people in Port Harcourt. Had a 3MCDO soldier, with the sea behind him and Biafran bullets in front the time

and space to loot and send the loot home by ship or by air? What is inferred here was that Sector 2 with Akinrinade at Aba, and Sector 3 with Alabi-Isama at Uyo would give a soldier permission to travel with his loot to Port Harcourt or Calabar to load it into a ship or send it by flight to Lagos. This also meant that the soldiers had someone in Lagos already contacted by these same soldiers or officers for that matter, to collect such loot? The story does not add up. There was also the issue of abandoned property in the war front when Obasanjo was commander. These properties were sold.

- a. To whom were the properties sold?
- b. Why were they not resold to the children of original owners who had their documents if they had to be sold in the first place?
- c. Gen. Gowon announced, “No victor, No vanquished.” Were the owners of the property not Nigerians? Those affected were the vanquished I think. What was the AIM of the so-called abandoned property? Was it just to deny the owner, or because some highly placed Nigerians wanted them?

My Command Page 87, para. 1.

Meanwhile, I was tackling the problems of commando girls.

Comments

Was the presence of commando girls the reason we lost Owerri and Ohoba and could not recapture them? This girl in the picture below died of tetanus and that was why the other girls were given uniforms and boots. Col. Obasanjo arrived when the war had virtually ended and did not see what war was and the roles played by these women. I was there and I knew. This was the sacrifice and the tragedy of

the 3MCDO Division ladies during the Nigeria-Biafra war. The lady was a guide and interpreter.

image

My Command Page 87, para. 2.

On the pay side, one practice which I found too tempting for the officers concerned and too dangerous, was that of the paymaster - a young captain having to go to Lagos regularly every month to collect almost three million naira for the Division's salaries, expenses, etc. and for lack of banking facilities and strong rooms having to keep the money in his bedroom until it was all spent. The Central Bank and commercial banks were contacted to re-open their Port Harcourt offices. The Central Bank and the National Bank of Nigeria responded admirably and I was able to put an immediate end to practice of the paymaster and other officers sleeping with huge amounts of cash in their bedrooms.

Comments

Col. Obasanjo was writing here about lack of banking facilities and strong rooms, but he approved payment of full salary in cash to fighting men in the jungle. Where were the troops to keep their money but in their pockets, or to their brigade as he suggested? If 2000 men in the brigade decided to keep their money with the paymaster, will he not be keeping or sleeping with a large sum of money? This again, he put an immediate end to. Not thinking correctly is madness. I think that the point has been made. Which is more tempting — allotment to family or in the pocket of another officer who himself could drop dead anytime.

My Command Page 88, para. 4.

(i). Self-inflicted injuries had reached debilitating proportions in the Division. More than fifty per cent of casualties within the Division were suspected to be the result of self-inflicted injuries.

Comments

Self-inflicted injuries were limited to Sector 1, which the new commander caused. There were many deserters as well because after seven bloody months, beleaguered inside Owerri, without adequate food, nor water to drink, let alone to bath. They broke out on their own, only to be sent back to die when there were over 50,000 other troops who could have been exchanged for these tried and tired souls. But the new commander was not listening; and only when all had failed, did he start what should have come first and what we all asked for, - to 'reorganise' before the final campaign into Ibo heartland. New situations and different terrains usually called for new plans, new approaches, and new strategies. There were no self-inflicted wounds and deserters in 2,3 and 4 Sectors. Only in Sector 1. Please read page 609 to see how I gathered his deserters about 500 kilometres away from sector 1. George Innih became a paymaster in the war front. Brigades would keep the money of any soldier who wanted his money kept for him. If, the poor soldier is killed in combat after six months, then the kept money goes to whom? No wonder, they say that some Nigerian Army generals are rich people!

image

My Command Page 88, para. 4.

My first action was to establish a rest-and-recuperation camp at the division headquarters in Port Harcourt, run and

administered by the Garrison Commander, Lt. Col. Ignatius Obeya.

Comments

It is true that in some armies, assault pioneers combine infantry and combat engineering training. However, the more I read *My Command*, the more I lean toward advising the army to stick to its division of labour system rather than having an army engineer command an infantry unit just because of seniority. The thinking is just not the same, nor is the training. Here, the new commander wanted a rest area which was later established in Port Harcourt under a seasoned senior officer, Lt. Col. Ignatius Obeya. But Capt. Buhari, a field commissioned officer was commanding 16 Brigade. Col. Obasanjo was briefed accordingly, and also that each sector had what we called 'Stress Reset Centres,' which he described as a 'Rest and Recuperation Camp'. That was fair enough. But for tens and twenties and may be hundreds, to be sent there, was the issue. What vehicle was available that would bring such troops from places like Obubra, Ugep, Calabar, to Port Harcourt Rest Area and take them back, when, according to him, Biafran troops were as close to Port Harcourt as Igrita, less than 80 kilometres away? Obubra was about 800 kilometres away from Port Harcourt. This was an army engineer reading an infantry pamphlet. Little did we know that we were playing politics already. All officers looked at each other and wondered what to make of it all. The 'rest area', of course, failed at last.

***My Command* Page 89, para. 1.**

I instructed the Commanding Officer of the military hospital who, by then, was the young and energetic Major Ferreira to seek out glaring cases of self-inflicted injuries for military discipline.

Comments

The medical officer mentioned here was based at Port Harcourt - again Sector 1. It was at this stage that Col. Obasanjo started to realise that army engineering was different from the infantry. Self-inflicted wounds were in Port Harcourt Sector 1 only and he caused it.

Page 90, para. 2.

Again after consulting my officers and studying the operations of the Division, the deployment on the ground, the logistics situation and manpower problems, especially the shortage of experienced officers and senior non-commissioned officers.

Comments

The new commander started to consult his officers. That was good to know, as we had all learnt at the expense of the thousands that had already died. Col. Obasanjo, who put a senior Lt. Col.(Obeya) in charge of recuperating centre, and a Field Commission Captain (Buhari) to command a brigade in combat, now wrote about shortage of experienced officers. Something was definitely wrong. The heading of Chapter VI1 is titled, 'Mastering The Job' on page 65. No wonder it all started from a wrong footing. My boss was learning on the job.

It was not our duty to teach him. We just wanted him to listen to some of us who had been in the war front for about two years and more. It had nothing to do with age or seniority. It had a lot to do with experience. Obasanjo had no battle experience anywhere before he was posted to command 3MCDO Division, the best fighting machine of the Nigerian Army, built by no other than Col. Benjamin Adekunle. It was a pity indeed.

We made every effort, however, to show him how we did it, how to do it, and how we got to where we were, liberating today's Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Bayelsa States before he arrived. The seasoned officers and men of the Pincer Team of 3MCDO went ahead anyway, and without Col. Obasanjo, to end the war.

Page 90, para. 3.

Lt. Col. Akinrinade became General Staff Officer 1 in charge of operations and training at the Headquarters, in essence my second-in-command.

Comments

This was our fear that, should anything go wrong in any sector of 3MCDO, either Akinrinade or Alabi-Isama would be called. Here we go again. There were other senior officers like Godwin Ally, Ayo Ariyo, Eromobor and Ignatius Obeya who could have handled the situation even better but no, it had to be Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama. That was why we kept shouting and advising and warning before things went wrong. Once again, with all the other senior officers there, in Col. Obasanjo's reorganisation, Lt. Col. Akinrinade became his deputy. We were back to square one. Is a GS01 a deputy in a military organisation? Godwin Ally and Ayo Ariyo were senior to Akinrinade in the division.

***My Command* Page 92, para. 2.**

Apollo Battalion was never used to hold ground. After operating it yielded ground gained to formations and units meant to hold ground. The speed and style of its operation inspired terror within the rebel camp and respect and admiration among our own troops.

Comments

This is not true. It is a fiction and fallacy. Where did Apollo Battalion operate in 3MCDO Division? Owerri was right in front of Col. Obasanjo and he could not retake the town with Apollo Battalion operating behind imaginary enemy lines. Even in the final battle for Uli-Ihiala, where was Apollo Battalion deployed, and who was the commander? When 1000 counted men were killed at Ohoba, which was his very first order for battle, Obasanjo did not launch his new Apollo reserve battalion, so where were they? They only existed in the military book he read the night before the battle, as he was still 'mastering the job'. Obasanjo wrote on page 92 of his book that he named this so-called imaginary Apollo Battalion after the landing of man on the moon by the Americans in July 1969. I guess this must have pleased the Americans.

My Command Page 94, para. 1.

Reinforcements received were not immediately launched into battle as used to be the case. They were trained and given some form of battle inoculation before they were made to face the rebel fire. This practice yielded handsome dividends in reduced panic, fright and casualties when the reinforcements were eventually launched into battle.

Comments

I wonder if Col. Obasanjo was describing 3MCDO. Well, Adekunle gave room for this. Adekunle, a Sandhurst Military Academy graduate and uniformed officer versus a Mons officer cadet graduate!! How can Adekunle's 3MCDO not have reserves but, I Alabi-Isama, led 3MCDO from Calabar to Port Harcourt in 30 days, a distance of about 480 kilometres with reserves located at Ugep, Itu, Opobo and Bori Ogoni? I had only eight casualties and captured 480 kilometres of Biafran territory. The used-up reserve was in Sector 1 only.

The 3MCDO troops inherited by Col. Obasanjo were seasoned troops who had been fighting from Obubra to Calabar to Opobo, to Bonny and Port Harcourt. No well-trained infantry officer will launch recruits immediately into battle without any so-called baptism. The baptism in 3MCDO was offensive defensive training and patrols. We had a training school. Where did Obasanjo establish his training school?

What Col. Obasanjo was trying to achieve here was to create the impression that the entire 3MCDO Division was out of form or shape, and that he reshaped the 3MCDO Division all by himself, whereas this reorganisation was as a result of his initial failure while Mastering The Job.

The map on page 93 of his book, as far as 3MCDO Division was concerned, is wrong. 3MCDO did not advance from Calabar to Oban, Ekeke to Obubra. 3MCDO did not advance from Ekeke to Uyo and did not advance from Oron to Uyo. The advance from Oron was to Opobo town and Calabar to Creek Town, to Itu and to Uyo by crossing Itu River at Affia Isong. I led the two attacks. The plan was to appear behind enemy lines and the plan worked. We had no gunshot casualties. Our hospitalised troops were suffering from malaria, dysentery, typhoid, cholera and snake bites. We attacked Ugep and Obubra with 7,000 3MCDO troops. We had records of everyone. There were no records of the dead, wounded or captured 3MCDO troops at Ohoba till date.

image

image

image

How we gathered deserters from Sector 1

My mother went to the war front, saw an attack, and the downed Biafran plane at Eket. On her way back, she reported to me that she saw skeletal Nigerian soldiers and some without shoes and clothes running away when they saw the jeep she was in. The troops that went with her told her that they were deserters from Sector I at Ohoba near Owerri about 500 kilometres away, and she was told why they deserted.

She then advised me to put two or four of my troops at any road junction, with food and other victuals to last about a week there. She further advised these soldiers to allow the deserters to stay if they wanted to without asking questions; and since they would be hungry, and with the food there, they would stay and that in about two weeks the four soldiers at the junction would have increased in strength.

She warned that if we failed to handle the situation carefully, they would be all over the towns and villages and might damage our cordial relationship with the towns people as they would forcibly find food, and might molest the women and children. In that case, we might need more troops to search and capture them and we might end up fighting our own troops.

What we would achieve if we accepted her advice would be a peaceful gathering of these deserters and not the deserters scattering into the towns and villages and molesting people. Finally, they would be used as reinforcements while guarding the junction where they gathered, against Biafran infiltration. We, did just that. The four soldiers at the junctions that were selected were given food and a lady nurse visited them weekly. Those who had serious illness or wounds were evacuated to the hospital. The nurses reported back that the number grew to 20 and more at some places within the first week. So I visited some

of these places and advised them to take proper defensive positions and the most senior of them to be in charge and to start weapons training and tactics. By the second week, they were over 50 at some junctions and were then moved to various units and did well. Given the results, her advice, was quite ingenious. She was only a woman, a simple mother and trader who had no knowledge of formal warfare.

We did not have to send military police after them, and they did not enter the villages and towns to molest civilians. I was happy, they were also happy and that method was repeated many times. That was one of the ways that we rounded up deserters from Sector 1, got reinforcements while some civilian refugees from nearby villages also joined them. It almost turned into a refugee camp. The troops got trained, were re-kitted, documented, recuperated and did not refuse to fight. They all did very well and there was no problem of desertion at their new units as their commanders kept their eyes on them. Some of the refugees were encouraged to return home, while many became our informers.

Chapter IX of *My Command* Straightening the Line

***My Command* Page 95, para. 1.**

During and immediately after the reorganization of the Division, my main preoccupation was how to stabilize and straighten the defensive line of the Division while gradually building up the fighting effectiveness of the formation. The line of defence held by the Division as can be seen from the map sketch on page 62 was almost indefensible and untenable.

Comments

It may not be necessary to fault Col. (later Gen.) Obasanjo on the idea of straightening what he called, 'The line of defence'. Firstly, he was an army engineer where they use rulers and measuring tapes. Secondly, if I were he, I would have tried to find out why the lines were not straight. We probably would have laughed at the question, but he would have learnt why. When you ask, you learn more. In infantry, we do not use rulers or measuring tapes, we judge distances. Where we stopped in Sectors 2,3 and 4 represented the political boundaries of South-eastern State. When Port Harcourt was captured, the front lines were the boundaries of Rivers State and South-eastern State. It was Sector 1 that had a problem which was a fall out of Adekunle's 'OAU'. The answer was not a straight line. The answer was to look for Biafra's centre of gravity, not piecemeal attacks which replicated Biafra's conventional tactics. I will also not blame Obasanjo totally on this subject because he also was a mate of these same Biafran officers.

The mentality was that things must be done by the book rather than initiative based on the reality on the ground, and as the situation dictated. I remember the situation during the recapture of Ikot Ekpene. We had envisaged how they would react to our trap, and that was exactly what they did. Our troops were told to run rather than move in an organised retreat, they chased us rather than launch an organised attack. When we opened fire, they realised that they had been trapped. But it was too late. It is only on ceremonial parades that the infantry look for a straight line; not in the war front as each unit no matter how small, even a section of ten men advance in arrowhead formation and has its own objective and a ruler would not be necessary.

Page 95, para. 1.

I had managed to beef up the brigades to reasonable strength while at the same time keeping some two thousand and five hundred men in reserve as reinforcements and replacements for battle casualties. I had also succeeded in stockpiling a reasonable reserve of arms, ammunition and materials, sufficient for waging up to a forty-eight hour battle by each brigade.

Comments

Adekunle's supplies finally arrived. In the meantime, many had died. So why the hurry? That was why I was happy to be transferred to 1 Division in late 1969. We had officer's mess and took our time for everything, a great difference from 3MCDO. When 1 Division captured Nsukka, they were well-rested, well-stocked and kitted. It took 4-6 months before they advanced on Enugu their next objective.

Page 95, para. 2.

My plan for the comprehensive operation across the whole front to straighten the line of defence was to start with 16 Brigade and 14 Brigade so as to relieve pressure on Elele and Igrita areas and to push the rebels further away from Port Harcourt.

Comments

14 Brigade and 16 Brigade mentioned here were both in Sector 1, before Akinrinade took over 14 Brigade with Ola Oni as the new commander. The infantry do not straighten lines on the battlefield, except on ceremonial parade ground. In defence, we hold defensible grounds, and in attack, we have objectives; even a section of ten men advance as arrowhead for all round defence not straight lines.

Page 96, para. 2. (last sentence)

Major Tomoye and his men had creditably acquitted themselves under the coordination of Lt. Col. Akinrinade.

Comments

Once again, Major Tomoye was the brigade commander but Lt. Col. Akinrinade was the coordinator. Why did Col. Obasanjo use a coordinator? What type of military set-up was that? Here was the same commander who frowned at the use of sectors, now using a coordinator. Col. Obasanjo had started to learn and understand here that initiative was better than opening the book. The military pamphlets taught us the basic principles of war, but when you are confronted with the realities of war and you open the book again, it means that you did not understand it from the beginning. It is called 'mugu.'

Page 97, para. 1.

They had regarded the Division after the Owerri debacle as a push over. They knew better after this encounter. It was also the first major rebel offensive since my assumption of command and it was an all - out offensive. Col. Tony Eze told me at the end of the war that our successful check of that southward advance by the rebels disorganized their Southern operations for many weeks after.

Comments

The Biafrans knew where to attack. They never tried Aba or Ikot Ekpene, nor did they try Obubra or Calabar. Nobody ever recaptured Aba from Akinrinade until the war ended. It was good that Col. Tony Eze told Obasanjo that, and that was why Biafra lost the war by going for wrong targets and chasing the shadow. Was Col. Tony Eze himself not labelled a saboteur in Nsukka sector? He also led the Biafran troops that were routed by my troops at Ikot Ekpene. Owerri front was the wrong way for Biafra. Instead of going to Uyo/Oron axis, which was 3MCDO centre of gravity at the time, they wanted Owerri and Port Harcourt. If Oron was captured, 3MCDO would have collapsed in one straight swoop. That was our own centre of gravity. That was why I personally went to counter-attack Ikot Ekpene. This was why 13 Brigade became the largest and the best organised in 3MCDO. I made sure it was so because of our centre of gravity on Uyo/Oron axis. We did not have to use tired and spent troops when we had an alternative. We also did not have to attack because such was better in defence and Biafran troops would never come back. We also did not have to lose 1000 men dead and many wounded to achieve this. In any case, we achieved nothing from his wild goose chase but calamity.

We also realized that the orthodox planning, preparation and execution were unsuited to our type of terrain and operation.

Comments

At last. It was costly in men and materials, but he learnt. This was mastering the job indeed. I was sacrificed but thank God. Col. Obasanjo had learnt again that infantry operation was not army engineering. Even in army engineering, when Nigerian army engineers under Col. Obasanjo tried to build Ojuelegba bridge right here in Lagos after the war, the bridge collapsed in the front of all invited guests on the day of opening. Why did the bridge collapse? It was because they thought that they had the preserve of knowledge and failed to consult those who knew better on the subject, like the COREN. They mismanaged the project and did not avail themselves of the expertise of others. That was why the infantry has what was called 'O Group' (Input of all into a final plan of action).

Page 97, para. 2.

In short, we had made mistakes from which we had learnt good lessons and the lessons we learnt stood us in good stead in the subsequent stages of our operations. Although casualties were high - some one thousand and four hundred killed, wounded and missing at the end of that operation.

Comments

That said it all. Obasanjo finally agreed to have made mistakes from May 16th, 1969 to December 16th, 1969. Mistakes were made and lessons learnt after nearly 1,500 troops (a Brigade's strength) were wiped out at Ohoba in only one hour of battle. Just imagine a GOC who came to the war front to learn on the job. Obasanjo had always taken

over uncompleted jobs. The only project I know he initiated from beginning to the end was Ojuelegba Bridge Project in Lagos which ended in disaster.

Page 97, para. 2.

What had to change was tactics and not strategy. We organised, refitted and refurbished. The success of 12 Brigade operations had a tremendous moral-boosting effect on the two adjoining brigades-17 Brigade on the left and 13 Brigade on the right. I then decided to exploit the advantage further by directing at once that 13 Brigade and 12 Brigade should link up across what territory remained between them on the Aba -Ikot Ekpene road. Without losing time Major Innih, prepared his brigade for this operation. His advance came up on 15 October, exactly a week after the initial advance of 12 Brigade. He had witnessed the beginning of the movement of 12 Brigade. This was in itself good evidence of the change of spirit from the destructive and mutual ill-wishing which had characterized officer relation-ships and operational activities before my assumption of command of the Division.

Comments

First we lost six months mastering the job and then it was not until many of our soldiers had died as a result of OAU, Ohoba, line straightening and those un-military thoughts and plans had failed woefully over a six-month period, that Obasanjo realised like we say in Nigeria that khaki no be leather. He then put the horse before the cart. He put first things first, he consulted with his officers, he reorganised, re-fitted, regrouped, and then moved on. That was a lesson that Adekunle failed to learn. Who was wishing who ill-will? We just did not want any more of those unnecessary and

avoidable deaths, with money in dead soldiers pockets everywhere.

We will read later that it was from here that the officers refused to listen anymore. They pitched their tents, put up command posts, and we were all linked up by Operation Radio 301.1 was at Enugu. I invited officers of I Division to my war room at Justice Aniagolu's beautiful house at New Haven to listen to the advance of 3MCDO. Akinrinade, Tomoye, Isemede, and Ola Oni never came back to base until the war ended and Biafran troops surrendered.

Chapter X of *My Command*

The Link-up and Operation Tail Wind (The Final Offensive)

***My Command* Pages 102, para. 1**

Although the task assigned to 3 Marine Commando Division after stabilizing and straightening its defensive line was the recapture of Oguta and Owerri and exploitation forward of the Divisional line thereafter, nevertheless I carried out a reappraisal of the entire war situation and in particular of the situation within my operational areas after the line-straightening operations around November, 1969. I came to the conclusion that the advantage gained in the line-straightening operations should be exploited to the fullest and that once the rebels were on the run they should never be given respite. A rebel divisional headquarters disturbed and almost captured intact before being hurriedly evacuated like the rebel 12 Division in the Omu Aro area could only be a fighting formation again if given respite. I was prepared to be so obliging.

Comments

After losing so many men at Ohoba and at line straightening, which, according to Col. Obasanjo, was as directed by the Army Headquarters, he then realised that the Oluleye instructions as commented earlier was a piece of trash. Obasanjo then reappraised the entire war situation.

Attacking Ohoba was baseless and line-straightening operation was dumb and not in military combat operation; only on ceremonial parades. Then he started to listen to more sensible and experienced officers, though junior to

him. He then realised after all that the so-called orders from Army HQ was too elementary for consideration. After this realisation by Obasanjo, he then carried out a reappraisal of the entire war situation. But from May 1969 up to December 1969, many 3MCDO troops had died, all in the name of 'mastering the job'.

Pages 102, para. 2

I held discussions and consultations with my staff officers and subordinate commanders and they all agreed with me that our best plan of operation was to keep the rebels on the run and to keep hitting at their identified and established weak front and rear position and by so doing cut the rebel enclave and its forces into two and deal with the two parts separately. We were all convinced of the soundness of the idea and the plan to bring it to fruition. The plan was simple: to continue to chase the rebels northwards along the wide front Aba-Ikot Ekpene until we linked Aba with Umuahia and Ikot Ekpene with Bende thereby dividing the rebel forces into an Arochukwu-Obafia enclave and an Owerri-Orlu enclave. The Arochukwu enclave was to be dealt with first and the last battle was to be over the Owerri-Orlu/Uli-Ihiala enclave.

Comments

Col. Obasanjo held discussions and consultations with his staff officers and subordinate commanders on what next to do and how to go about the operations by linking up with 1 Division at Umuahia and Bende, thereby dividing the rebel forces into an Arochukwu-Obafia enclave and an Owerri-Orlu enclave. Please see the original map and pictures of: 'Operation Pincer 2' on pages 627 and 628. Is there any doubt left now on who made the plan? The map and the pictures have said it all. Why then did I deserve to be

discredited? Obasanjo wanted Arochukwu first, but for what?

In any case, the Pincer Team knew what to do. Obasanjo, the GOC and Innih, a brigade commander went the wrong way on the day of the final battle to Arochukwu. By the time they turned back, the war was over, Uli-Ihiala was captured, Biafra had surrendered.

13 Brigade was lost for four days and on the fourth day after the battle and the war was over, he showed up. Akinrinade then told Col. Obasanjo in annoyance on the operational radio that he would not like to see George Innih near him again, or he would shoot him. But how did Col. Obasanjo expect George Innih commanding 13 Brigade, the largest brigade in 3MCDO, to swing right to Arochukwu, some 150 kilometres away, and then pivot left, for another 150 kilometres to join in the most important battle for Biafra's centre of gravity-- The last battle? How fit would the men be on arrival for battle? Think of about 3,500 men in a war setting jingling around the countryside and then turning back. How many vehicles are we talking about here? Did they have vehicles to achieve this? They were not on picnic, or ceremonial parade.

image

The plan was not original to him as he claimed in his book *My Command*. But so what? We wanted his success so that we can succeed together, and he succeeded. Rather than give us all our own deserved credit, he chose to discredit us all, particularly myself because of my outburst at Ibadan when he said that he was not going to the war front because he was an army engineer.

Surprisingly, when the war ended in 1970, he was still commander of 3MCDO. He ran into more problems in the handling of all the Biafran officers that he jailed at Port Harcourt prison. Then there were guerilla operations against 3MCDO locations, including the bombing of our ammunition depot. He was in real trouble. Then, I had been transferred by him to 1 Division in Enugu.

General Hassan Katsina, the Chief of Army Staff sent for me, and I went to see him in his office in Lagos.

“ Alabi, your brother is asking for you, “ he told me.

Which one sir?” I asked him.

“Col. Obasanjo at 3MCDO in Port Harcourt,” he added.

“ If you do not want to go, I will understand.”

I agreed, and the next day, I was at Port Harcourt and reported for duty as his GS01.

Obsanjo’s problems were simple. With no-victor-no-vanquished statement of General Yakubu Gowon, all Biafran officers that surrendered to 3MCDO were sent to Port Harcourt prison. Their families were not allowed to see them.

Many of our own troops from his recuperating centre were just milling around, aimlessly, jobless and recuperating on their own and were found roaming around Port Harcourt town molesting women and stealing. Obasanjo ordered their arrest and sent many of them to Port Harcourt Prison.

The prison was full and overwhelmed. The prison superintendent who had no food, water or any clothing for them all except the clothes on them when they were

arrested. They had been there for about a week before my arrival.

When the recuperating troops were released from Port Harcourt prison, they were told to trek back to their unit. They refused and gave a condition that they would only go if a vehicle was sent for them. The prison riot became fierce and uncontrollable. The issue of abandoned property came up because when the Ibo owners of these properties came back to Port Harcourt, the natives at Port Harcourt did not let them take over their family properties and, of course, it was cutlass for cutlass until the sound of guns were heard all over Port Harcourt.

The troops of 19 Brigade recruited by Isaac Boro from the riverine areas joined in the battle. They went into ammunition depot, took a sizeable quantity and burnt down the store. It was like the war front all over again. At this time, Akinrinade had been transferred to 3MCDO rear in Lagos to replace Lt. Col. Abisoye who then came to the war front for the first time as GS01 to Col. Obasanjo.

Then the rioting troops headed for Shell Oil installations. The MD of Shell had been introduced to me at Port Harcourt by Mr Charles Harding who was at the time MD of the Standard Bank of Nigeria. We played golf together. Then the MD of Shell sent me a message about the problems about to start at their installations. So with Capt. Omowa Roland, we went there and the situation was temporarily calmed down but it was not over yet.

Firing was reported at Aba, Owerri and at Abonnema. The Ibo communities at the border areas of Aba and Ikwerre land started claiming ownerships of schools they had built in the area which were said to be part of abandoned property. Of

course, it was cutlass for cutlass and gun for gun all day, all night.

The situation was beyond police control and the governor, Navy Lt. Commander Alfred Diete-Spiff got in touch with the GOC, Col. Obasanjo who then called for a meeting. I had reported for duty at Port Harcourt.

At this juncture, I gave my suggested solutions which were accepted. I was told to go ahead and implement as suggested.

That all 3MCDO troops in prison must be released at once but in order to ensure that the GOC, Col. Obasanjo does not lose face, the troops would be made to trek back to their rehabilitation centre and that I would lead the march from the prison yard, and address them. The families of the officers should be allowed to see them and that I should accommodate and feed them on my own. This was also agreed. We set up an enquiry into the land dispute and I asked for the help of Mr. Saro Wiwa who was very helpful in establishing the civil defence for Port Harcourt and calming the warring communities to wait for the enquiry report.

A committee was set up in respect of abandoned properties and that was before I arrived at Port Harcourt and some of the properties had been sold already. One of the officers on the committee was Capt. David Mark who explained the situation. We stopped the sale briefly and by 1971, I was already out of 3MCDO. He offered me one property but I declined as I did not have money to pay. He was shocked and did not believe me.

I then implemented all I had promised including the eight kilometres march from the prison yard to the rehabilitation centre. We sang all the way and the troops were transferred

later to their various units and the rehabilitation centre was disbanded and closed. All the wives, children and families of the ex-Biafran officers who cared to visit were my guests at Port Harcourt. I accommodated and fed them until the situation was resolved.

Col. Obasanjo then asked me to take him to the MD of Shell which I did.

image

image

I had sent Capt. Omowa ahead to announce my visit in the company of the GOC, Col. Obasanjo. 19 Brigade was then saddled with the duty of protecting all Shell installations in the area. The rioting stopped but all 3MCDO ammunition had been burnt by the time I arrived at Port Harcourt to take over from Lt. Col. Abisoye as GSOL. Joint patrols and road blocks to check for miscreants and trouble makers were mounted by the police and the army in a joint operation.

The troops surrendered to me and then were kept busy training and were being prepared for rifle shooting competition and inter unit sports competitions which I arranged. Within three months, all situations had calmed down, and 3MCDO won the army sports competition but lost the shooting competition to 1 Division. Col. Obasanjo thought that I had come to quarrel but he was wrong. I kept myself so busy that I had very little or no time for discussions other than the reorganisation, military and sports training that I had planned. All we needed was to keep the troops busy after the war. I did just that.

As if these were not enough, Col. Obasanjo called me to attend a civilian meeting with him at Benin City scheduled for 2.00p.m. the next day, but because of the bad road, we

had to leave early at 7.00a.m. which was fine by me. I told my photographer, Sgt. Amusa Bolomope (now of BCOS Ibadan) to accompany me to the meeting in order to take pictures. The GOC had agreed that we should go in his staff car as I had no car that could make the journey on the bad road while Sgt. Amusa Bolomope would ride with escorts of the GOC to Benin.

At 6.45a.m. when I got to the GOC's house for the trip, he had left at 6.30 a.m. He did not inform me of the change of time. So he left and I had no other way of getting to Benin as my vehicle would definitely not make the trip. I thought of going to the governor to ask for a vehicle for the trip or to go to my friend, the Shell Oil Company MD. Just as I was toying with all these ideas and why Obasanjo left at 6.30 a.m. instead of the 7.00a.m. as scheduled, a Nigerian Air Force (NAF) little plane was just landing at the airport at Port Harcourt. With Sgt. Bolomope, I rushed to the airport.

It was Capt. Gbadamosi who brought some spare parts for the NAF detachment. He was about taking off back to Lagos when we arrived at the airport. I pleaded with Capt. Gbadamosi who agreed to take me to Benin City on his way to Lagos. I arrived 9.30a.m. while Obasanjo arrived at 2.00p.m., looking rather tired. When Obasanjo saw me at the meeting he was shocked, and I did not give him the opportunity to discuss the issue. From the meeting at Benin City, I took the local flight to Lagos and the next day, I took another local flight to Port Harcourt. So I got to Benin about four hours before GOC arrived and both of us did not talk about it. It was the GOC's orderlies that told Sgt. Bolomope that they left at 6.30a.m. and there was no telephone to contact me for the change of time. I did not complain and both of us never discussed it.

image

Pages 103, para. 2.

I went to Army headquarters to hold preliminary discussions with the General Staff Officer on my new idea which was dictated by the situation on the ground and which was of course different from Army headquarters' May Operational Instructions which had not been altered. The Principal General Officer, Col. Oluleye, insisted on my keeping to the Army Headquarters directive no matter what the situation in the field dictated. He did not want a repeat performance of the 2 Division episodes of advancing to and capturing Onitsha but without ever securing the road link between Onitsha and Enugu. And of course everybody was more interested in the capture of Uli-Ihiala airstrip than in anything else.

Comments

Gen Hassan Usman Katsina, who became the Chief of Staff (Army) in May 1968, was briefed on Operations Pincer 1,2 and 3 during his visit to 3MCDO in July 1968 after the capture of Port Harcourt. That was when 3MCDO started going astray with Adekunle's operation OAU. According to his memoirs, in mid-October 1968, the GS01 at the AHQ, Col. Oluleye visited 3MCDO HQ in Port Harcourt and subsequently raised the possibility of creating a 4MCDO from the 3MCDO as an option to sending Adekunle on leave or replacing him altogether. But Gowon was not convinced yet. I was not told about Oluleye's visit, I did not know about it, I was always with the troops in the frontline. Anyway, it was Uli-Ihiala or nothing. When Obasanjo was confused about what to do, Operation Pincer Team left on their own and ended the war after capturing Uli-Ihiala.

Pages 103, para. 3.

I was convinced that my plan would make the capture of the Uli-Ihiala airstrip quicker and easier. My gentle persuasion would not convince staff Officers at the army Headquarters of the soundness of my plan and the unlikelihood of a repetition of the Division experience. I left Lagos for Port Harcourt still committed to my plan and mindful of Army Headquarters' apprehension and the consequences. Page 103 of *"My Command"*.

Pages 103, para. 4.

Earlier, on Monday 10 November, Port Harcourt airport had suffered another rebel air raid more severe and more damaging than the Count Bon Rosen minicorn raid in May. Two Air Force aircraft, a MIG 17 and a L 28, were slightly damaged. But what was more demoralizing, especially for the civilians, was the damage to the roof of the VIP section of the terminal building and the total loss of one DC 4 cargo aircraft belonging to Pan Africa Air Charter on charter to Presidential Hotel Port Harcourt Page 103 of *My Command*.

Comments

Col. Obasanjo was finally convinced that Operation Pincer 2 was the way to go at last. It was not the only way to do it, as there were other methods of achieving the same result, but definitely not the initial way we had gone about it. On May 24 and 25, 1969, Swedish Count Carl Gustaf Von Rosen's Minicon ground attack planes raided Port Harcourt, Enugu and Benin from Uli-Ihiala and damaged our NAF MiG 17 and IL 28 jet fighters and bombers on the ground. Subsequent raids over several months hit Warri, Sapele, Forcados and Ughelli. Like most situations in our country, we always set up inquiries, results of which never saw the light of day. This was the war front. Let us get things done, and stop the pre-occupation with inquires. Soldiers were dying, and we could

do the inquiry while moving on with the problem at hand. In the case of the Biafran Air Force menace, we knew where they were coming from already, so, we ought to have gone for that immediately while the inquiry was on. Given the limitations of the fast MiG-17s and cumbersome high altitude Ilyushins for ground attack, what these raids re-emphasised was the strategic importance of Uli as a prime target for ground operations.

When I saw his confused look which suggested doubt, disbelief, and a lack of comprehension, I explained again, using the same map. All the 3MCDO problems were in Sector 1. Let us stop the blame game and get on with it. I further explained, by going into details using the same map.

The remaining 16 Brigade should be beefed up to strength, to defend their present position to disallow further Biafran advance across their defence line.

19 Brigade commanded by Maj. Aliyu, should also be beefed up to strength to take up defensive positions where they were.

15 Brigade that was still at Omoku, should also be brought up to strength, and, with an extra battalion, should advance to Uli-Ihiala, passing through Ebocha, Mbebe, to Izombe, Mgbidi, with Oguta to the left. The extra battalion would be left to defend Izombe, to avoid Biafran troops at Oguta from interfering with the advance of the main body of 15 Brigade advancing to Mgbidi. They would bypass Owerri to the right, as we did not need Owerri. Otamiri River would be on the battalion's left flank.

Then, 12, 14, and 17 Brigades under the command of Akinrinade, should advance from their present Sector HQ at Aba, to Inyigugu, with Owerri to the left, aiming for Orlu. I

also explained that 3MCDO never fought in the towns. We always bypassed them, surprising Biafran troops that expected us to fight inside the towns and villages, on the streets, including perhaps house-to-house fighting, which we avoided by all means. Based on the projections, I predicted that Akinrinade would take Uli-Ihiala in exactly seven days of crossing the start line at 'H hour'. We were lucky. I continued saying that 1 Division had captured Okigwe in October, 1968, followed by Umuahia in April 1969, (which was two months before this briefing). Col. Obasanjo himself arrived in May 1969 three weeks after Umuahia had been captured. 13 Brigade, which was in my Sector 3, was already the largest of all the brigades, then advanced along both sides of the river to rendezvous right of Akinrinade at Urualla to take Nnewi (Ojukwu's hometown), behind Uli-Ihiala.

18 Brigade, another brigade in Sector 3, would hold its position at Itu and be prepared to enter Arochukwu, should the Biafran troops in Arochukwu move against Pincer troops of 13 Brigade. A battalion each was still standing by in reserve at Obubra, Ugep, and at Ikot Okpora, under the command of Lt. Col. Ignatius Obeya, who was the commander of 18 Brigade, should the Biafrans move against Calabar instead.

The next scenario was if Biafran troops would move towards Oron axis from Ikot Ekpene front which was our own centre of gravity. In that case, the battalion at Ikot Okpora, and 18 Brigade based at Itu, would enter Arochukwu behind the Biafrans. Either way, a dilemma would be created for Biafran troops at Arochukwu if they ever moved. Their best bet was to do nothing. Col. Obasanjo then took a good look at the map and the plan again, while Col. (Fr.) Pedro Martins laughed, and said that he was impressed. When, in 2009, Mr. Kayode Williams of NTA (Nigerian Television Authority)

and I went to see Fr. Martins at his Victoria Island residence in Lagos for his 90th birthday belated greetings, he remembered everything in detail as related to the Operation Pincer 2 briefing in Port Harcourt. It was incredible.

image

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image

Pages 103, para. 5.

On returning to Port Harcourt from Lagos at the end of November, I decided to discuss my plan with 1 and 2 Divisions and to seek their co-operation. I sent a staff officer to 2 Division to discuss my plan with Lt. Col. Jalo and to find out about his plans for operations on the ground. I personally went to Enugu on 4 December to discuss my plan with GOC I Division Col. Bisalla and seek his cooperation. He was away from his Headquarters but I discussed my plan with GSO 1, Lt. Col. Danjuma, who was quick to appreciate the merit of my plan and went as far as to say that if he were the GOC he would grant my request for advancing his troops 16 kilometres south of Umuahia while my troops advanced for more than thirty miles to link up with 1 Division on the outskirts of Umuahia. I only wanted the simultaneous movement to stretch out the rebel forces and to prevent concentration of what remained of their three divisions in that area against my troops alone. Lt. Col. Danjuma sympathized with my plan but told me that his GOC was committed to operations in the Awka Nnewi sector, and might, therefore, not be able to help me. He asked if I would still go on with my plan; I affirmed I would. When Col. Bisalla returned to his headquarters, he sent me a message regretting his inability to make any move in the Umuahia

sector that could help my operation because of his own impending operations in the Awka-Onitsha and Okigwe sectors. By virtue of its own area of operation there was not much that 2 Division, which was virtually left out of battle, could do to assist in the planned link-up with Umuahia but my staff officer brought back Lt. Col. Jallo's expression of understanding, moral support and encouragement.

Comments

These show that the plan which he had rejected became the cornerstone of 3MCDO victory. As chief of staff to Adekunle, all these options for the operation at hand were made available to him (Obasanjo) as the new commander. In this case, we had Operations Pincer 1, 2 and 3. Operation Pincer 1 would have caused too many casualties while Ops. Pincer 2 and 3 would cause fewer casualties on both sides. The Biafrans would have been caught unawares while still operating their offensive, defensive tactics on Ohoba-Owerri front. But Col. Obasanjo preferred Operation Pincer 1, despite all advice against it. He then went about contacting the other two divisions. Fortunately, the Pincer 1 idea was turned down by both Col. Bisalla of 1 Division and Col. Jalo of 2 Division. Col. Bisalla's point was very valid. He said there would be too much blood and that the aim of the war was not to exterminate the Ibo people or permanently change their culture by us occupying Iboland. I was impressed. It was then that he had a rethink on Operation Pincer 2. It was at this time that Col. Obasanjo suddenly transferred me to 1 Division at Enugu. When I remonstrated over being asked to go from one war front to the other as if I started the war in the first place, he lied that it was the Chief of Staff (Army) (COSA), Gen. Hassan Katsina, that transferred me from 3MCDO to 1 Division. So, I went to Lagos and reported to AHQ. The normal protocol was for me to see the GSOL, who was Col. Oluleye, for permission to see

the COSA. Col. Oluleye said that the COSA could not see me that day because he was preparing to go for a meeting at Supreme HQ. I then got annoyed, pointing out that I was coming from the war front, but the COSA would not see me because he was preparing to go to a meeting. I left, but at 10.00 a.m. the next day, October 19, 1969, I went to Col. Oluleye again for permission to see the COSA. Again, he said it would take time, and that I should be patient.

image

image

I sat there for about an hour. When I was running out of patience, I went into the COSA's office, I just opened the door in annoyance. Col. Oluleye followed, intending to stop me from going inside the office. But the COSA got up, hugged me and called me, 'Alabi-Isama the Commando Chief, Commando Strategist' about four times, and we both laughed. I tried to salute, but he just hugged me. It was then that Col. Oluleye quickly and quietly walked away and left both of us alone. He asked what I was doing in Lagos and I was shocked. I told him the story all over again, and that I could not see him when I came the day before because his GSOI said he was preparing to go to a meeting, which he denied. I asked why I was transferred to Enugu from Port Harcourt, and why the order said I should move immediately. He denied initiating the move, adding that Col. Obasanjo told him I would like a transfer to 1 Division, which he approved. He was himself surprised about it. He then told me to sit down and ordered for tea. We were there talking about the war front Op. Pincer 2, when Col. Obasanjo came in. General Hassan just got up and said, "Oba, you told me that Alabi-Isama asked for a transfer to Enugu", but before the general finished I stood up quickly and denied ever making such request.

Col. Obasanjo then asked if I could go out, and I said I would first finish my tea, and I was not in a hurry to do so. Col. Obasanjo then asked if he could come back, to which the COSA agreed. I then told the COSA that I would leave for Enugu immediately. He called the airport manager, Air Force Capt. Dickson about the possibility of my getting a flight for that day. Capt. Dickson told him that there was a DC3 loading but was scheduled to leave the next day, and the pilot was a British pilot called Mr. Boozy Bonzo. I told him that I knew Boozy well when he was delivering supplies to us at Calabar. He loved his whisky. So, I left the COSA and went to the airport to get the timing for take off. Boozy was there, and I got him two bottles of whisky. He was pleased. Just as we took off, it started raining with thunder and lightning. I asked if we were to return to base as the flight was bumpy to which he answered no, that we should continue the journey. We were not 20 minutes into the flight when he said that the Commander of the Nigerian Air Force had just crash landed and died. Col. Shitu Alao was flying an L-29 Air Force jet, but Boozy reassured me that with the DC3, we would have no trouble. Finally, we got to Enugu, and settled down to work.

I set up a war room with Operation Pincer maps and an operational radio and linked up with 3MCDO - Akinrinade, Ayo Ariyo, and S.S. Tomoye. From Enugu, I listened to their radio orders and comments at 3 MCDO. A few days later, we went for a meeting in Lagos and I accompanied Col. Biasalla who was the new GOC. Earlier, he had asked me about these Pincer operations, and what it was all about. I explained the entire military movement all over again to him on the map for two days. He listened attentively and asked questions which I was happy to answer. When we got to the meeting in Lagos, he told Col. Obasanjo that he would not be interested in his plan for Operation Pincer 1, and that it would be too bloody, and would not be advisable for the future of ONE

NIGERIA, and the code of conduct of the war by Gen. Gowon.

Pages 104, para. 3.

Again a gradual building up of men and materials had started in earnest once I was persuaded of the need to pursue my plan of action. The three brigades to be directly involved in the link-up were 17 Brigade, 12 Brigade and 13 Brigade. But the preparation was not just for the link-up, it was for a final offensive as well. By 3 December, I had issued fresh instructions for the beefing up and strengthening of the brigades as follows: 13 Brigade got two additional battalions, 111 Battalion and 122 Battalion, making a total six battalions under its command. 14 Brigade had one more, 113 Battalion, making four under its command. 15 Brigade had one more. 161 Battalion, increasing the total to three under its command. 16 Brigade had one additional battalion, 162 Battalion, making four. 17 Brigade, like 13 Brigade, had two more battalions, 163 Battalion and 164 Battalion, making a total of five. 19 Brigade was raised to four battalions with two new ones, 167 Battalion and 168 Battalion. 12 Brigade and 18 Brigade remained with three battalions each but each battalion was built up to strength. It was this slight restructuring that saw the division through to the end of the war.

Comments

Readers should note that everything in My Command was “I did, I thought, I planned”. Col. Obasanjo planned nothing.

When Col. Obasanjo arrived at 3MCDO, he met four sectors. To recapitulate: Sector 1, whose 16 Brigade under the command of Lt. Col. Utuk initially captured Owerri with Lt.

Col. Godwin Ally as Sector Commander which later withdrew to Ohoba. It comprised 14,15,16 and 19 Brigades.

a. 14 Brigade commanded by Major George Innih withdrew from the right flank of 16 Brigade at Inyogugu straight back to Chokocho for about 80 kilometres before he stopped south of Owerri. This move set up the Owerri salient, but he quickly rushed to Lagos to brief the new commander on falsehood. We did not know that he did that until we read My Command, where Obasanjo wrote that Innih came to brief him in Lagos.

b. 15 Brigade commanded by Major Makanjuola withdrew from Oguta which was the left flank to Omoku another 30 kilometres south of Owerri.

c. 16 Brigade led by Lt. Col. Utuk took Owerri and stayed there for about seven months, while 14 and 15 Brigades could not go back into their positions left and right of Owerri.

d. Sector 2 was commanded by Lt. Col. Akinrinade. It initially comprised 17 Brigade but 14 Brigade was added after Major Innih was relieved of his command and replaced by Major Ola Oni. Akinrinade was based at Aba.

e. Sector 3 was commanded by Lt. Col. Alabi-Isama and comprised 12, 13, and 18 Brigades with HQ at Uyo/ Ikot Ekpene.

f. Sector 4 was commanded by Ayo Ariyo; and was based at Calabar.

Col. Obasanjo in his book, My Command, kept running down the entire 3MCDO as a force with low morale, which lacked discipline. He also created the impression that salaries were unpaid, and that the welfare of soldiers as was expected in

the barracks and what he learnt as a cadet in 1958 was totally absent. All of these were said to discredit Adekunle. Sadly, Adekunle gave room for these comments of course. However, you will read here that it was 12,14 and 17 Brigades that were under the command of Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama that were called upon to execute Op Pincer 2 which ended the war.

Pages 105, para. 1.

The three brigades for the link-up completed their preparations and by 22 December they had received their operational instructions.

Comments

The three brigades referred to here were 12, 14 and 17 Brigades (Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama's troops).

Pages 105, para. 2.

The plan was for our own troops west of Imo River and east of Orashi River to maintain active probing operational activities while the linking-up operation proceeded. The linking up was planned in two unbroken phases with the three brigades advancing concurrently and almost side by side. The first phase was to be launched from the Aba-Ikot Ekpene road, a secure base up to the line of Mbawsi -Mbulo-Ogbuebule. The second and final phase which was to follow on the first phase without interruption or respite was advancing and linking up with 1 Division troops at Umuahia and Bende. 17 Brigade was on the left of the advance from Aba to Mbawsi to Umuahia. 12 Brigade was in the centre from Umu Aro to Mbule to Umuahia. 13 Brigade kept to the right from Ikot Ekpene to Ogubule to Bende. To allow for greater flexibility greater use of initiative and closer co-operation among the commanders, an operational

instruction rather than an operational order was issued to each brigade. I planned to make the link-up a Christmas present for the rebels and the Federal side alike.

Comments

The troops west of Imo River and east of Orashi River that were to maintain active probing were 15, 16, and 19 Brigades of Sector 1. So, Op. Pincer 2 was falling in place. Col. Obasanjo said, “I planned to make the link-up a Christmas present for the rebels and the federal side alike”. As it was with Adekunle, the moves were successful and Obasanjo started to personalise it. He wrote, “I planned, I did”. Everything he did alone; whereas, he was using my plan, the same person he had discredited.

Pages 106, para. 3.

I had ensured sufficient stock of arms, ammunition and other materials to be able to see the link-up successfully through and since the operation had been unsupported by Army Headquarters.

Comments

Again, “I had ensured”, says Col. Obasanjo. Adekunle went to Lagos from April 1968 for 51 days and returned without the supplies he went for - so Obasanjo ensured sufficient stock. That was all I asked for, and was to be hung for.

image

Maj. S.S. Tomoye was our instructor on Op. Pincer 2. The idea was to show that if you understand a situation — teach it. Tomoye explaining Ops. Pincer 1, 2 and 3 to all officers involved.

Pages 107, para. 2.

17 Brigade launched its attack on 22 December and 12 Brigade followed almost immediately. The progress was initially slow but once the break was made in the rebel defences, the pressure was piled up by 17 Brigade until Owerrinta junction was reached and the rebel troops defending it were completely surrounded. They gave in and surrendered after a dispirited and feeble defence.

Comments

Here 17 Brigade was commanded by Major Tomoye who was my Brigade Major in the 13 Brigade and conducted the training for all officers and men on Op. Pincer 2. Again, this was Akinrinade's former brigade before he became 'coordinator'. What a new military word! 12 Brigade was mentioned once again here. All these were from Sectors 2 and 3 - Akinrinade and Alabi- Isama's units.

Pages 107, para. 2.

By the time the rebel High Command realized that our plan was to link up with Umuahia and Bende, before they could draft troops, armored vehicles and guns from their 'S' Division and 13 Division around Owerri to try to prevent such a fatal assault and bisection, Federal troops of 12 and 17 Brigades moving side by side were already knocking at the gates of Umuahia.

Comments

12 and 17 Brigades were knocking at the gates of Umuahia - again, these two brigades were from Sectors 2 and 3. (Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama). Akinrinade was still the 'coordinator'.

Pages 108, para. 1.

Within three days 13 Brigade also entered Umuahia and Bende. By that time the areas occupied by Federal troops between the two rebel enclaves had increased and widened. The danger of a repetition of 2 Division's Onitsha episode had been permanently eliminated. By 28 December 1969, I was left with two enclaves of the rebels to deal with and quickly too. And so I decided on a plan to accomplish this. But meanwhile, on 30 December 1969, in spite of the fact that I had decided to keep Lagos in ignorance of the details of the progress of our operations.

Comments

Within three days, 13 Brigade also entered Umuahia and Bende. This unit was from Alabi-Isama's Sector 3 before I was transferred to Enugu because Obasanjo was going to implement my plan — Op. Pincer 2. However, this was three days after Akinrinade had led 12 and 17 Brigades into Umuahia already.

Page 109, para. 1.

13 Brigade was to roll on to Arochukwu and Ohafia to deal with that enclave. It was to be an extension of that Brigade's link-up operation between Ikot Ekpene and Bende. The Brigade had earlier ear-marked two battalions for the Arochukwu/ Ohafia mopping up operation. They were to advance and to accept the rebels' surrender collectively or individually. After a quick shake-up the Brigade moved through 18 Brigade in Itu, crossing the Cross River.

Comments

This was a very busy infantry operational plan. 13 Brigade (under Innih) which was the best set-up and equipped,

advanced to pass through 18 Brigade (under Obeya) which had been stationed there since April 1968 with a total of 1500 men, and had to cross the river into Arochukwu. How many canoes or landing craft did they use? We are beginning to understand that perhaps Col. Obasanjo wanted Akinrinade to fail. Well, after capturing Arochukwu, did the war end? We will read later that it was after the capturing of Uli-Ihiala that the Nigeria-Biafra civil war which had lasted from 1967 finally ended in January 1970. This wrong move by 13 Brigade led by Innih as commanded by Obasanjo caused more casualties than Akinrinade/Tomoye/Ola Oni/Isemede's Pincer moves. It was at this wrong move that Capt. Gagara who had been at the war front since 1967 died. Lt. Col. Obeya was senior to Innih. Why should Innih pass through Obeya to capture Arochukwu? We do not do that in infantry. Obeya had 18 Brigade on ground there since April 1968. He knew the terrain, he had studied his plans and moves, and all his troops knew what to do. They were only waiting for orders on when to move. All enemy positions, their strength, the extent of their defensive positions and their reserve in depth had been studied and mapped out already. So, how would Innih from another location over 150 kilometres, without knowing the positions and other details about the enemy just get up on foot advancing the wrong way with over 3000 men, with their equipment, kits and heavy weapons without vehicles achieve results?

Since Operation Pincer 2 plan was to go west to Uli-Ihiala, he then thought that he could go East first to Arochukwu with a view to making the plan original to him. Once again he lost.

Page 109, para. 1.

By 4 January 1970, the operation which had commenced there days earlier had made satisfactory progress and the rebel stragglers were being picked up one by one. After a visit to Arochukwu to see the progress of the operations for myself, I decided to put the plan for the final offensive - Operation Tail Wind - into action. The plan was to use all the troops of the Division, less 18 Brigade which was to take over Arochukwu area from 13 Brigade, in the final offensive to crack the rebel stronghold and the heart of rebellion and secession.

Comments

In this operation, Akinrinade was made to lead 12,14, and 17 Brigades, a total of 4,500 men, to link-up with troops of 1 Division at Umuahia and then to head on to Uli-Ihiala. Meanwhile, 13 Brigade with another 3,000 men supposed to join Akinrinade in the attack on Uli-Ihiala were sent the wrong way to the right about 150 kilometres away to link up with the sedentary 18 Brigade of 1,500 troops at Itu to attack Arochukwu! It was like ordering troops to capture Ibadan from Lagos but diverting the most potent element of the assault force to Benin City first, to turn back later to join the attack on Ibadan. Incredible! Again it was like the final battle for Baghdad. Imagine an American general sending his best troops — the marines towards Basra where the British troops were already stationed, to pass through the British position there, and then come back to Baghdad for a mop up. That was what Col. Obasanjo did. I could not believe it. 3MCDO war successes were not without plans. This move was planless, and, of course, it failed to achieve any result.

Interestingly, while the key battle was raging on towards Uli-Ihiala, Col. Obasanjo also went the wrong way to Arochukwu, to be with the troops that he sent the wrong

way. Such a tragedy can only happen here. In the meantime, the Biafran Minicons that attacked and destroyed NAF aircraft at the Port Harcourt airport and were planning an expanded strategic bombing campaign to Apapa port in Lagos, came from Uli-Ihiala, but we were attacking the wrong target at Arochukwu.

Obasanjo himself was visiting Arochukwu over 150 kilometres away from the objective - Uli-Ihiala on the day of the final battle. Akinrinade and the Pincer Team just ignored him and moved on to Uli-Ihiala and captured it with 12,14, and 17 Brigades.

Pages 109, para. 3.

The mission was for the Division to advance and secure the Axes Owerinta, Okpuala, Olakwo, Owerri, Awomama, Uli, Ihiala and Owerri, Atta, Orlu and to exploit forward to link up with 1 Division. In detail, the plan was for 12 Brigade to clear Obokwe, Eziamma, Okpuala and Obor Ovoru all along the western side of Imo River, securing a bridge head from Owerinta to Okpuala for 17 Brigade. 17 Brigade was to capture Ihite, Olakwo and Owerri and secure a bridgehead on Njaba River at Awomama for 13 Brigade which was to capture Northern. Oguta, Mgbidi, Uli-Ihiala including the airport in one axis and Atta, Orlu including Uga in the other axis linking up with Okigwe. 14 Brigade, 16 Brigade and 19 Brigade were to link up with the 17 Brigade advance from their southern positions, 15 Brigade was to capture Oguta and link up with 13 Brigade.

image

Comments

In this entire paragraph, it was 12 Brigade, 14 Brigade, and 17 Brigade all over again. Every other brigade -13,15,16

and 19 were to link up. In other words, 4,500 troops would attack while 6,000 would link up. In any case, Majors Isemade, 12 Brigade Commander, Ola Oni of 14 Brigade, Tomoye of 17 Brigade and Lt. Col. Akinrinade the 'Coordinator' were not complaining because they had known what Col. Obasanjo was up to. Since the Pincer 2 operation was the plan of these officers, they knew where the gaps were, and what to do to execute it successfully. We already had all intelligence details of Biafran troops deployment required to succeed over a period of six months. That was precisely what they did, and ignored Col. Obasanjo who, as he wrote in his book, was still mastering the job.

Pages 110, para. 2.

It is pertinent to emphasize that 13 Brigade which was clearing up the Arochukwu/Ohafia enclave was ear-marked for the last leg of the operation. The reasons were that it was one of the best-organized brigades in the Division at that time, it was the largest one, with six battalions and adequate troops' reinforcement and replacement, and, as a result of its size, and it was better equipped than the other brigades. A lesson that had been learnt earlier was not to produce lengthy operational orders which could fall into rebels' hands even before the launching of the operation. Operation Tail Wind order for the final offensive was two-and-a-half pages long. And the order was issued in writing twenty-four hours before H-Hour and after a restricted order conference attended only by participating subordinate commanders.

Comments

Here, the plan was for 12,14 and 17 Brigades of 1,500 men each to attack while the best brigade, the largest and the

best organised, with over 3,000 men, would take part in the last leg of the operation. The 13 Brigade had veered the wrong way to the right, about 150 to 180 kilometres away, and was to swing left another 300 kilometres to the objective as if it was an Independence Day parade. How were 3,000 men to do that? They had few vehicles, and all had to be on foot. As we will see later, Akinrinade captured Uli-Ihiala and Biafran officers and men had surrendered to him - just using 12, 14 and 17 Brigades a total of only 4500 troops of 3MCDO had ended the war by capturing Biafrar's centre of gravity at Uli-Ihiala. These were men from Sectors 2 and 3 - the same condemned sectors. Sector 1 troops were not in the picture.

Pages 111, para. 4.

Suddenly I started to feel physically and mentally exhausted. The strain of the past three months began to tell. But I kept pushing myself to see Operation Tail Wind through and I decided that whatever might be its outcome I would take a short break for rest at the end of it.

Comments

After three months in the war front, Col. Obasanjo wrote, 'The strain of the past three months began to tell'. He never made any plans, never led any attack like Adekunle, and did not draw any map. One can then imagine what energy-sapping experiences those of us who had been in the war continuously for two years with Adekunle must have had. Within the three months, Col. Obasanjo had been to Lagos four times to brief the AHQ, and to brief the Head of State, and to receive instructions from Col. Oluleye. Col. Obasanjo took over an already mostly organised and successful war front in which Sector I needed tweaking but he had to condemn everything done by the people he met on ground,

and his predecessor, simply to take the honour for the victory entirely by himself. Akinrinade and his officers just went on regardless, and ignored him. While Obasanjo was busy visiting Lagos, Akinrinade, the coordinator, was expected to live in the trenches forever. Akinrinade never got to the airport, let alone to Lagos. He was the deputy and the coordinator. Anytime there was an attack, it was either Col. Obasanjo would go to Port Harcourt to issue ammunition, or he would go to Lagos to brief the Commander-in-Chief and the AHQ. They all knew what was happening anyway, in Lagos, because they all had copies of Operation Pincer 2 maps which Akinrinade and I gave them.

Pages 111, para. 5.

I returned to Port Harcourt, issued my orders, moved 12 Brigade through 14 Brigade position and launched the final offensive at 600a.m. on 7 January 1970 at Obakwe with 31 Battalion of 12 Brigade leading.

Comments

Here again were 12 Brigade and 14 Brigade both of Sectors 2 and 3 not Sector 1; while Akinrinade was still the coordinator. What a new military terminology!

Pages 112, para. 2.

Before night-fall, Okpuala had been captured and the rebel soldiers defending the river line had been caught completely unawares from behind and most of them fled throwing their weapons into the river. They were out-manoeuvred and surprised. A clear bridge-head had been established for 17 Brigade but two bridges which it was to use to move across from Owerinta had been previously demolished by the rebels. This was unknown to us but such a contingency had been planned for. Brigade therefore had

to be moved on night through 14 Brigade and 23 Brigade locations to Okpuala. No time was lost by 17 Brigade in advancing towards Olakwo.

Comments

Again, in this paragraph, it was 12,14 and 17 Brigades - all sectors 2 and 3; with Akinrinade as the coordinator while he Col. Obasanjo was off again to brief the AHQ or Commander-in-Chief or to issue ammunition.

Pages 112, para. 2.

The tactics were effective and by noon on 9 January Owerri had been captured. So far the plan had worked like a well-oiled machine. The rebel 14 Division commanded by Col. Ogboyu Kalu had been destroyed as an effective fighting formation. The rebel 'S' Division on the Owerri-Elele road commanded by Lt. Col. Asoya had been disorganized and scattered when 17 Brigade troops appeared in their rear. Their 'S' became 'scattered' instead of 'special'. The speed of movement of all the commando boys into Owerri was such that the rebels could not collect their thoughts nor muster reinforcements and replacements for the town. By night fall on 9 January 17 Brigade had reached Njaba River at Awomama and Uli-Ihiala airstrip was being threatened by our 122mm artillery shells.

Comments

Here again, 17 Brigade had reached Njaba River and our artillery was threatening Uli-Ihiala. Where were the others? It was Akinrinade all over again with Major S.S. Tomoye, Ola Oni, and Isemade, on Operation Pincer 2 plan. Where was Godwin Ally the Sector 1 commander in all these? Of course, we knew that the plan would work. We had all intelligence reports on maps, direction of movement of Biafran troops,

the refugees and position of reserves and Uli-Ihiala airport. With prayers, no way could the Pincer Team lose. The preparations and training had been perfected.

image

Pages 113, para. 1.

The mopping-up operation of 13 Brigade in the Arochukwu area had taken slightly longer (about twenty - four hours more than originally planned) so we spent the whole 10 January waiting for 13 Brigade to move into Awomama and Owerri to continue the advance on two axes to Uli-Ihiala and to Atta - Orlu and Okigwe.

Comments

In this paragraph, which discusses 9th/10th January 1970, my brigade, the largest Brigade, and best equipped with over 3000 troops was still at Arochukwu - the wrong way. Akinrinade told me that it took three days before the first troops from 13 Brigade showed up, after 12, 14 and 17 Brigades had captured Uli-Ihiala and the Biafrans had surrendered to him (Akinrinade) Major S.S. Tomoye and Major Ola Oni. The GOC was in Port Harcourt in his office, just arriving from Arochukwu area, where he went the wrong way. For the final battle, Col. Obasanjo did not even have a command post. He was preparing for a party for General Adebayo. This was on the day of final battle to end the Biafran civil war.

Pages 119, para. 2.

By 12 January Oguta, Uli-Ihiala airstrip, Atta, Orlu, Uga had been captured.

Comments

By 12 January 1970, the operational centre of gravity of the Biafran Army and State had been captured, Akinrinade survived but Major S.S. Tomoye did not survive the Nigeria-Biafra war. He died on the day the war ended in a vehicle accident on his way home to his family.

Pages 120, para. 2.

Throughout the period of my command during the war, I was concerned not only with bringing about the end of the war but also with the method and the cost of doing so. My aim in this respect was to bring the war to an end with the minimum loss of lives on both sides but particularly on the Federal side and in addition I was concerned with ensuring that bitterness at the cessation of hostilities was reduced to absolute minimum.

Comments

If Col. Obasanjo wanted the war to end with the minimum loss of lives on both sides, he would not have ordered the attack on Ohoba where over 1,500 men were killed, or promoted the idea of Op. Pincer 1, which if implemented, would have killed hundreds of thousands of people. The final battle started in December 1969 and by 12th and 13th January 1970 the war ended as predicted by Operation Pincer 2's idea, strategy, and plan. We predicted 30 days for the completion of the war from the 'H' hour but from 22 December when the Pincer 2 battle started to January 13th when it ended it was 23 days but we had spent six months on trivialities and incompetence. Map 8 in his book, My Command shows that Col. Olusegun Obasanjo was truly an army engineer; neither a military strategist nor an infantry tactician. His claim to the plan is untrue. Did the Biafran troops surrender when Arochukwu was captured? The answer is No. This is because it was not their centre of

gravity; and until Uli-Ihiala became untenable, which was their centre of gravity, Biafran troops never surrendered. Why the waste of life, time and resources from May 1968 until January 1970, where Adekunle was either looking for OAU, or Obasanjo was looking for a ruler to straighten the line?

Chapter XI of *My Command* Surrender

***My Command* Page 123, para. 4.**

Lt. Col. Akinrinade at Owerri and he confirmed that before Effiong's broadcast our troops were at Nnewi on the left and well beyond Orlu and Uga airfield in the centre while linking up with 1 Division troops along the Imo River on the right. I gave the text of my message to all troops to him and before I returned from Port Harcourt I directed him to make contact with rebel High Command.

Comments

Here again the GOC who said that he had arranged for the final battle to take place was in his office at Port Harcourt when the Biafran troops surrendered to Akinrinade. Akinrinade was GSOL which was the equivalent of Oluleye's job at the Army HQ in Lagos. Col. Obasanjo left Akinrinade in the field rather than in the office and as he called him, Akinrinade was his 'coordinator'. Col. Oluleye never got to Ikeja Airport in Lagos, let alone getting to 3MCDO war front, but here was Akinrinade left with only 4,500 troops for the final attack on Uli-Ihiala while 6,000 troops and Col. Obasanjo went the wrong way.

Pages 113, para. 6.

My Public Relations Officer, Captain Hassan, had kept going the reception party called in honour of Brigadier Adebayo. After a quick clean-up and change into mufti. I joined the reception. The reception had turned into a mini victory party. Apart from messages of congratulations from all guests, Brigadier Adebayo proposed a toast to the victory of

the 3 Marine Commando Division. The party over, I withdrew to make plans for the following day.

Comments

While Akinrinade, Tomoye and Ola Oni were advancing toward Uli-Ihiala, Col. Obasanjo had no command post, he was partying with Gen. Adebayo in Port Harcourt at his HQ, about 480 kilometres away. So, the party for Gen. Adebayo became a victory party.

Pages 113, para. 7.

After seeing Brigadier Adebayo off at the airport, on 13 January I made straight for Owerri, and from Owerri to Orlu, I was told that Lt. Col. Akinrinade and Major Tomoye had made contact with senior rebel officers and had gone to see them but no one knew where exactly they went. I followed with my escorts in the general direction of Nkwerre and Uga. After going for some distance, I decided to inquire, but nobody could give me an answer as to their whereabouts.

Comments

The General Officer Commanding(GOC) 3 Marine Commando Division of Nigerian Army, Col. Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo got lost on the day of the final battle to end the three years of Nigerian civil war. Here again, he was looking for his officers in a situation that was the last battle to end the three-year civil war. Already, by this time, the Biafran troops, particularly the officers had surrendered. But Col. Obasanjo was looking for his 'coordinator.' I wonder what Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf would think if he read the book, My Command, if during his last battle in Iraq, in February 1991, he had the M1-A1 Abrams' tanks advancing against Saddam Hussein's Republican Guards, hear that the commander was partying while his troops were led by a

‘coordinator’ to end the war for which he got the glory while demonising the ‘Planners’. This same situation also happened when Adekunle went to Lagos in April 1968 and left us to advance 480 kilometres from Calabar to Port Harcourt. He got the glory we all got the boot.

Pages 124, para. 2.

On reaching Uga airfield without seeing my two officers, I turned back. Very near Orlu I met a junior officer who claimed that he knew which way the two officers had gone. He led the way while I followed. Soon we met the two officers feeling rather happy and elated and pleased with them. They told me they had just met Effiong and a group of rebel officers and civilians and had arranged a further meeting with me for the following day. I insisted on being taken there and then to where these senior rebel officers were. My officers felt it was unnecessary as they might all have dispersed, especially the senior civilian functionaries in their midst. On my insistence we all made for Amichi where we met Effiong in ‘Biafran’ Army uniform on the first floor of the house of Odogu, the head of ‘Biafra’s’ directorate of military intelligence. All the other officers were in mufti.

Comments

Akinrinade told me that Obasanjo was in Port Harcourt when Col. Achuzia came to him with the surrender message from the other Biafran officers. In the meantime, Obasanjo got lost and could not find his senior officers. Then he met a junior officer who led him to them. One can imagine the GOC (General Officer Commanding) 3MCDO Division, Col. Benjamin Adekunle, the best fighting machine of the Nigeria-Biafra war stopping his staff car to ask a junior officer, “Did you see Lt. Col. Akinrinade?” It reminded me of a famous poster-cartoon that showed a knight at a dirt road

junction asking passers by, “I am the leader of the revolution; in which direction did it go?”

This is Akinrinade, the same officer that Obasanjo said the soldiers did not know, and he did not know them. But here, one junior officer out of about 5,000 soldiers in the battlefield, with all the battle noise, and refugees all over the place, not only knew Lt. Col. Akinrinade, but also knew the direction in which to find him. In 3MCDO, we were never behind, while telling our men to go on. We were different and it showed. That was why when we talked, those who did not know needed to listen and to listen well. Col. Obasanjo the GOC who was expected to lead the attack for the final battle then finally found his unknown officer — Akinrinade, whom he then asked to take him to where the Biafran officers who surrendered were. All these were written by Obasanjo in My Command.

By the way, if General Gowon, the Commander-in-Chief, were to write a book, what would have been the title? My Overall Command, perhaps? Akinrinade simply said that it was not necessary to see the surrendered Biafran troops as they would have dispersed.

Pages 125, para. 3.

Now, I said to Philip Effiong, your broadcast did not go far enough to talk of negotiated settlement and peace talk in accordance with OAU resolutions at this stage is not only unrealistic but ridiculous to the extreme. We have no time for that. At that point Effiong suggested that we should talk privately together. We then went into a small room, obviously a bedroom, he with his staff officer Capt. Ben Gbulie and I with Lt. Col. Akinrinade who had been in Ben Gbulie’s intake at Sandhurst.

Comments

This paragraph further proves what happened and who really won the war for Nigeria. I was already transferred to 1 Division at Enugu. I called Col. Bisalla the GOC of 1 Division, Lt. Col. Martins Adamu the GSOL of 1 Division and Major Ibrahim Bako and some other officers to my war room at Enugu to listen to Major S.S. Tomoye on my RS 301 operational radio with which I monitored their action during Op. Pincer 2, which Col. Obasanjo renamed Operation Tail Wind.

Pages 128, para. 2.

The following morning, 14 January, I made straight for Uli-Ihiala airstrip, the symbol of 'Biafran' resistance.

Comments

In this paragraph, Col. Obasanjo called Uli-Ihiala airstrip, "The Symbol of Biafran resistance". This is the point he was told in May 1969 when he was briefed by Akinrinade and I at his home in Ibadan before being appointed commander of 3MCDO. We briefed him again in Port Harcourt at his HQ when he became commander of 3MCDO, and finally in my HQ at Uyo when he visited my unit, which was Sector 3; after he had gotten so many of our troops killed at Ohoba, and the deadly idea of 'Line straightening operation'. It was then that he realised that he was not going anywhere with 'Motion without Movement'. Like Mr. Kunle Oyatomi wrote in his book, Finger Prints. There were too many unnecessary activities but he was not achieving results despite all the warnings, he still went the wrong way, and the mop-up would be by 13 Brigade then commanded by Major Innih who had become his friend. Thank God that Obasanjo finally

realised after six months of talking and quarelling that Uli-Ihialla was the symbol of Biafran resistance.

image

Pages 140, para. 6.

That simple ceremony in the presence of members of the Supreme Military Council and other senior officers of the Armed Forces including General Officers Commanding 1 and 2 Divisions, the civil service and the world press marked not only the formal end of the civil war but also the beginnning of but also the beginning of the peacetime full scale operation and the nation-wide acceptance of the new political arrangement based on a minimum of twelve states which should more easily and successfully diffuse the political tension and conflicts of the country than the three or four- region structure of pre-military era. It should also assuage the fears and counter-fears of the different groups better than the previous structures.

image

image

Comments

In this paragraph we were told how simple the surrender ceremony was in Lagos with other senior officers but the 'coordinator/ Lt. Col. Alani Akinrinade, was not invited. Like Alabi-Isama, he never saw Lagos, never enjoyed leave, and never went to the welfare area established by Col. Obasanjo. Rather Obasanjo would either travel to Lagos to brief the Commander in Chief or was somewhere else on inspection, or issuing ammunition. He was never there when the battle was hot. Col. Benjamin Adekunle "The Black Scorpion" was

also not invited and had never been invited to anything until this day. It is a tragedy.

When 13 Brigade was sent in the wrong direction, the commander was Major Innih, who never joined in the final battle and was being expected by Lt. Col. Akinrinade, for the final battle into Uli-Ihiala. When he was nowhere to be found, Lt. Col. Akinrinade, Major Tomoye, Major Ola Oni and Isemmede went on to finish the war. Akinrinade sent a message to Obasanjo several times that Major Innih and 13 Brigade had not shown up and after four days of not seeing them, the final battle to end the civil war began. Major George Innih and Col. Obasanjo went in the wrong direction. While Major George Innih was about 250 kilometres away at Ohafia and Arochukwu, Obasanjo was another 480 kilometres away, partying in Port Harcourt.

image

Pages 141, para. 2.

Unfortunately Ojukwu's last statement, broadcast on French Radio on 14 January and published in *The Times* of London of 16 January 1970 while he was already in exile, showed him as unrelenting, unremorseful and feeling no regret for his disastrous leadership.

Comments

With the surrender of Biafra and Biafran troops, Col. Ojukwu never denounced Biafra. The political system of Nigeria later brought Ojukwu back to Nigeria. He even contested election under the Hausa-led political banner of NPN (National Party of Nigeria) and lost. I was beginning to doubt if the Ibos loved Ojukwu or just used him and when they did not need him anymore, they did not vote for him in peace time! I wish the Ibos loved him enough to put him in the Senate. Can

you imagine Ojukwu at the Senate. Will anyone be bold enough to talk about third-term in office. I doubt it. He still did not denounce Biafra and was not made to do so. All the same, over two million Nigerians died on both sides, in an unnecessary war.

Since the end of the war in 1970, we have not been able to get the politics right. The book *My Command* is all fictionalised history.

EPILOGUE

The civil war in Nigeria started as a result of a military coup d'état on January 15th, 1966 by some officers of the Nigerian Army. While the coup was welcomed by many, there were some that were sceptical about its honesty of purpose. Many thought of the coup plotters as heroes because the coup came at a time the country itself was heading towards disintegration; while others thought of them as villains. General Johnson Thomas Ummunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi who finally took over the mantle of leadership in the country after that coup made matters worse by imprisoning these so-called heroes, thereby affirming that the coup plotters were indeed villains.

By the time the dust settled, the coup was found to be sectional as the planners were more of Ibo officers of the Nigerian Army, and so were the executors, while those who made the coup to fail were also Ibo officers. Instead of Ojukwu assisting the coup to succeed, he made it to fail in the north. He was 5th Battalion commander at Kano, while Ironsi's action of arresting the coup plotters made the coup fail in Lagos and the south.

Since Ironsi was perhaps not part of the plotters, he did not have the idea, the aim and the aspirations of the planners, so he continued with life as usual. But this time, it was an opportunity for Ibo leadership of the country both in command and control. He then introduced a unitary system of government and so he started to put in place those decrees that would put Ibos in control of the nation. So far, nothing was wrong with that until he missed the steps needed to do so. For instance, he did not know, or cared to know that the control of the country would depend, by and large, on the control of the armed forces. He removed

Ojukwu from command of 5th Battalion of the Nigerian Army in Kano, in the northern part of the country, to become the military governor of Eastern Nigeria. Major Igboba who also was acting commander of troops in Lagos, an Iboman, also felt guilty of the situation at hand and fled. So, Col. Mohammed Shuwa, a northern officer took over command of troops in the north at 5th Battalion at Kano. At this time, the Ibo officers were feeling guilty of the outcome of the coup which they realised was sectional. They probably did not mean it that way. They thus started evacuating their families home to the Eastern Region, not for them to prepare to fight, but to flee.

The reasons adduced for the coup, which almost the entire country embraced were lack of unity, corruption, nepotism and all the wrong words against our National Anthem. But, as soon as the dust settled again, many started to read other meanings into the coup, while questions were being asked if these were enough reasons for only the northern political and military leaders to die, especially in a coalition government in which the North, the East and the Midwest were partners. The question being asked was, if leaders of the coalition government from the North must die for bad governance, what about the non-northerners who were partners in the same so-called corrupt government from the other parts of the country? As I write, the east and the north, including the Ibos of the then Midwest Region, now Delta State, are in the same political party. They continue to rule the country together and the complaints will not stop, and are even getting louder than ever. Can we just stop and think for a while? The coup planners of January 15th, 1966 failed to appreciate, in detail, the aftermath of the military incursion into politics. The tragedy of this though, was that those who made the coup fail were also Ibo people.

So, when the northern troops recovered from the shock and realised that they were leaderless and with guns in their hands, they pounced on Ibos in the north in particular and elsewhere in the country. Since Ibo military leaders had fled or were fleeing from their posts across the country, Ibo civilians became vulnerable as there were no Ibo officers or troops to defend them. The killings were un-controllable which the Ibos termed a pogrom.

The country called Nigeria was now divided on tribal lines just like in politics. The military that was once the pride of the nation, and never in politics was now politicised and also divided on tribal lines with Area Command in the North, Area Command in the West, Area Command in the East, and Area Command in the Midwest. On May 27th, 1967, after meetings, debates and conferences, in which many still wanted One Nigeria, the Ibos had had enough. So, they moved home to the East en masse, where they felt safer, than in any other part of the country. Nigeria, is a creation of the British like India and Pakistan. The British did that to suit their purpose but not for the Nigerians. With so many different nations, ethnic and linguistic groups clamouring for their own independence, the British put all these together to form one nation and they ruled accordingly. All the same, each ethnic group tried to rule, and outdo each other particularly the major tribes - Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo.

The new government in Nigeria, led by General Yakubu Gowon after the Hausa counter-coup of July, 29th 1966 decided to do what the minority tribes had always clamoured for — to have their own states. Nigeria was then divided into twelve states with three in the old Eastern Region to replace the old four regions the country had before the coups, i.e. - The North, the East, the West, and the Midwest Regions. The Ibos did not like it as they would prefer to remain one while the other regions were divided

into smaller states. Col. Ojukwu had since become the military governor of Eastern Region which had become three new states — East-central State (Ibo core state), South-eastern State and Rivers State. On May 27th, 1967, Ojukwu who failed to appreciate the fact that to the victor goes the spoils, and who did not recognise the leadership of General Gowon, the new Head of State of Nigeria after the Hausa counter-coup of July 29th, 1966, and did not accept the creation of the three new states in his Eastern Region, and one of those who made the Ibo-led coup to fail, proclaimed the sovereign State of Biafra. The leaders of the July 29th 1966 coup now controlling the federal government and who loved the unitary government introduced by Ironsi, (the main reason for which he was killed) that put the north in complete control of the country rather than the old federalism, termed this a rebellion and would not accept the breaking-up of Nigeria. So the Eastern Region was not going to secede without a fight. The Western Region did not initially show much involvement in what was going on, while the Midwest with about forty per cent Ibo-speaking people, remained neutral though the salary of their civil servants and the military were being paid by the federal government.

The stage was, therefore, set for a civil war which started as the North versus the East or Hausas against the Ibos. Ojukwu and the Ibos were ready for a war they termed as the 'war of survival.' Therefore, right from the beginning, the Ibos realised that it was not another type of students' riot. The federal government termed it a 'Police Action' and thought that it was just a situation in which troops would just go to Enugu, the capital of Eastern Region, now Biafra, and capture Ojukwu. They were all wrong. However, when the war ended in favour of the federal troops, Ojukwu fled the country. When he had a pardon and came back to Nigeria, he joined the Hausa-led political party — the NPN, to contest federal election which he lost.

The first crack of shots took place on July 6th, 1967, at Garkem, a small town near Ogoja inside the new Biafra by 1 Division of the Nigerian Army advancing from the North. The civil war had started and was to end on January 15th, 1970 in favour of the federal troops.

Biafran troops entered the neutral Midwest Region through Asaba at about 10.00p.m. on the night of August 8th 1967. I was commander of the federal troops of the 4th Area Command at Asaba, Biafra's point of entry. The 4th Area Command of the Nigerian Army was not in a position to defend the Midwest Region due to its small size and without weapons, ammunition and logistic support. I did not know that the HQ of the 4th Area Command based in Benin City was not organised to fight. My troops at Asaba front were more of Ibo-speaking, and along with the natives of Asaba sided with Biafra and jubilated at the entry of Biafra into the Midwest Region which necessitated my fighting alone. Biafran troops were to capture Benin City by 12 midnight, and to capture Lagos at 6.00 a.m rush hour. I found myself alone and fighting alone until I was captured at Agbor by Capt. Ochei who, along with the other Ibo-speaking officers of the Midwest 4th Area Command, had joined Biafran troops advancing into the Midwest Region.

While I was planning my escape, Ochei wanted me to work with him and join Biafran troops advancing into Lagos. I listened attentively to his briefing which I thought was so elementary and that Biafra had missed the aim of their so-called 'war of survival.' Biafran troops advanced as far as the border of Western Region at Ore. Why was that necessary to achieve the aim of creating the sovereign state of Biafra? They had missed the AIM. Not only that they had missed the aim of creating Biafra, they had also opened another battle front which they later realised they could ill afford. They had missed what was most important to them

i.e military strategy. It was not Biafra that was the AIM, Biafra was the objective. Their AIM was their survival as a people. It is when they survived as a people that Biafra would exist not the other way round. Midwest, West and Lagos were not the extension of their territory, these were the extension of their security for survival. They had gone beyond their mandate which was security for survival.

What was achieved by this sloppy incursion into the Midwestern and the Western Regions was to wake up both the West and the Midwest Regions to join the war against them and so it was. It was like Nazi Germany during World War II attacking Russia and declaring war against the USA. Biafrans had bitten more than they could chew; they did not have the troops, equipment, logistics and the right strategy for their gamble of attacking the Midwest, the West and Lagos; definitely not by road alone and the number of troops deployed for the campaign. It was the aim and the strategy that dictated the tactics; both the aim and strategy employed were wrong and so were the tactics applied. The campaign ended in a disaster, with Biafra losing majority of their well-trained officers and men. That, to me, was the beginning of the end of Biafra. They never won any major battle thereafter.

As the war progressed in all fronts, their tactics were those of the World War I and textbooks written since World Wars I and II for instance, for Biafra's sake:

- Why was it necessary to enter the Midwest and Western Regions?
- The oilfields in the southern part of Biafra at Port Harcourt and Bonny were not defended with the seriousness they deserved - after all, there was no other way then for them to prosecute the war successfully without the control of the oil — for weapons and food.

- They alienated the non-Ibo speaking people by evacuating them from their homes, killed and maimed many, burnt their homes, especially at Annang and did not recruit many into the Biafran Army. Were they not Biafrans too?
- Many of the captured Biafran troops did not respect their officers who were already labelled saboteurs by Biafra High Command. Their discipline and morale were, therefore, very low.
- When we recruited captured Biafran troops into the federal troops on 3MCDO side, they were very loyal and fought well against Biafra. That proved the point that they were looking for security not slogan.
- Because they evacuated the natives from their homes, villages and towns, their logistic support for the troops became overstretched and had little or no food, water and medical facilities for the thousands of able-bodied men, women and children that were evacuated from their homes. When we (3MCDO troops) captured these villages and towns as we advanced towards Ibo heartland, we met so much surplus food to feed on while those who were evacuated from their homes starved and were at the mercy of the Red Cross or Caritas; who also could not supply enough for everybody.
- The Biafran propaganda eventually worked against them as they told their people that Nigerian troops were Hausas and would kill them and rape their women. The killings in the North during the unrest in 1967 had made them to believe their leaders' propaganda. However, when the natives found out otherwise, the refugees returned to their homes on 3MCDO operational area. The 3MCDO never had a refugee camp, or POW camp. Instead, the natives donated food to us, looked after our advancing troops, assisted as guides, guards and vigilantes which made us advance without having to look back. The natives which Biafra alienated assisted

us in the carriage of our supplies, ammunition, building of bridges, pontoons, paddling of canoes and intelligence reports on Biafran positions. We had not enough vehicles. These were the silent millions that fought with 3MCDO.

- The available maps were inadequate and so we relied on the natives to show us the way which they did happily in return for food, good relationship with our troops and their security.
- Most of Biafra's attacks were frontal and when they broke through our line in places like Oguta, Ohoba, Owerri, and at Ikot Ekpene, they got bogged down in the towns and villages with house-to-house, street-to-street and hand-to-hand fighting while we bypassed the town by enveloping them and moved on, which reduced civilian casualties.
- Their senior officers were too far behind and unable to read the battle quickly and that made command and control very difficult for them. 3MCDO knowing that, always advanced on wide envelopment tactics, in order to engage their reserves and main HQ first in a guerrilla type operations before the attack on the main body of their troops. The principle was that, if you scare the shepherd, the sheep will scatter. The principle worked.
- Their defensive positions were always on the shop window, and never wide and deep. So it was easier for us at 3MCDO to operate behind their lines. Once we knew their tactics, it was easy to counter their moves. It was like playing a game of chess. For instance, at Abagana, Biafran troops successfully ambushed 2 Division of federal troops in a convoy of about 100 vehicles carrying food, weapons, ammunition and medicines. They burnt everything to the ground while at Uyo, 3MCDO troops successfully ambushed a Biafran convoy of 26 vehicles. These vehicles were not

destroyed, they helped our logistics and accelerated our advance to Port Harcourt.

- 3MCDO found it very easy to divert their attention to wrong fire positions because they never were able to identify the difference between our main body and the diversionary troops. Call it the special forces, the guerilla or the 'chindits' whatever you call it, it worked. The federal troops prevailed in the 30 months Nigeria/Biafra war, especially in 3MCDO Sector where the war ended because of superior tactics, strategies and proper identification of Biafran centre of gravity rather than us defending or attacking enemy positions. The Biafran troops had no answer to our WWII modified 'Chindit' type idea of British General Slim's special forces operation that we introduced, and married along with our main forces of Isaac Boro and Aliyu, both operating behind Biafran lines en route Obubra and Port Harcourt. This type of jungle warfare was applied effectively and with devastating effect on Biafra's troops. This was the same reason why we did not attack Arochukwu or Umuahia, because what was needed was more important and different from what was wanted. Uli-Ihiala was needed but Adekunle wanted OOAU (Oguta, Owerri, Aba, and Umuahia) while Obasanjo wanted Ohoba.

Both of these commanders (Adekunle and Obasanjo) missed the grand strategy. They did not see beyond the immediate battle. When the noise was too loud for Obasanjo about his mistakes with over 1000 of his troops killed in less than an hour at Ohoba front within the first week of his arrival in the war front, he then settled down, and saw that, or finally realised that Uli-Ihiala was 'the symbol of Biafra's resistance' as he finally stated in his book, My Command, only after Akinrinade, using Operation Pincer 2 plan developed by Alabi-Isama had achieved results and Biafra surrendered to

him with little or no casualties and resistance. Obasanjo then realised that khaki is not same as leather. Our two commanders chased the shadow which led them astray. Obasanjo in his book, My Command wrote,

My Command, Page 97, para. 2.

In short we made mistakes from which we had learnt good lessons and the lessons stood us in good stead in the subsequent stages of our operations.

Although casualties were high -some one thousand and four hundred killed, wounded and missing at the end of the operation.

Obasanjo finally admitted. Why then did he try to discredit the planner and the strategist (Alabi-Isama) whose plan of operation pincer 2 ended the war and brought him glory?

image

As we found out finally, even when 1 Division of the federal troops captured Umuahia, the war did not end until 3MCDO went for Biafra's centre of gravity at Uli-Ihiala, not Owerri, Ohoba or Oguta. Of the estimated two million Nigerians that died in the civil war, over a million and a half were Ibo people.

Women, children and disabled, all of these died because there was corruption, tribalism, nepotism and all that. Did the killings stop or reduce corruption since the first coup? We had the so-called, military, corrective regimes for a greater part of our 50 years of independence, with each coup leader quoting corruption, tribalism, hospitals becoming clinics etc. as justification, but by the time the next coup took place, the clinics were no more there. We now celebrate these people as our role models and super

stars. Should we have fought the civil war? Should we have gotten all these people killed? Are we better now than in 1966 when the first coup took place in the country? The killed leaders then were accused of corruption among others — where are their estates — Balewa, Sardauna, Maimalari, Akintola? Today, who owns the estates in Nigeria?

Did the two million Nigerians killed in the civil war die in vain? Should we not have dialogued more? Tact as I was taught as a cadet was in itself a better act of valour. The tragedy of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war was the incompetence of leaders who got to their positions by time promotion rather than competence. The resultant casualty in men is incredible and the pains on the real fighters of the war remain indelible.

This is **THE TRAGEDY OF VICTORY!**